TROUBLED MASCULINITY: EXPLORING GENDER IDENTITY AND RISK-TAKING FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF A FRIEND

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the ways in which young men cope with the loss of a male friend to an accidental death. Using critical social theory—including masculinities theory, Bourdieu’s theory of practice and Paechter’s gendered communities of practice as a guiding framework—the project looks at the differential ways that young men think about and reconstruct their masculine identity and future involvement in risk practices following their friend’s death. In addition to qualitative interviews, this study employs photo-elicitation, which serves to thicken participants’ narratives and capture the complexities of grief, masculinities and shared practices. Findings suggest that while socially dominant ideals of Western masculinities such as stoicism, invulnerability and instrumentality informed young men’s grief practices, there was diversity in the way that participants made meaning from the death of their friend and how it influenced their own orientation to the risk-taking practices that caused his death. This study found that young men’s habitus (socially acquired dispositions of mind and body), social space and primary community of practice were influential factors in movements away from, or continued adherence to these practices.

Participants discussed the way that the presence of supportive individuals—particularly women—following their friend’s death facilitated a shift from a risk-orientated masculinity to one informed by responsibility and care for others. The photo-elicitation method used for this study underscored the usefulness of using arts-informed data collection methods to enrich a research conversation with young men. This research contributes to the body of scholarship on masculinities through an exploration of the nuanced constructions and expressions of gender after an experience of loss. Practically, it directs policy interventions
toward a community-based approach underscoring the importance of understanding the unique masculine practices that exist at the local level.
Preface

This study was undertaken under the direction and supervision of Dr. Shauna Butterwick, Dr. Elizabeth Saewyc and Dr. John Oliffe. Dr. Butterwick is faculty member in Department of Educational Studies at UBC and Drs. Saewyc and Oliffe are faculty members in the UBC School of Nursing. This study was part of a larger program of research entitled Young Men’s Response to the Death of a Male Friend, a project developed collaboratively by Genevieve Creighton, Jennifer Matthews, Dr. Saewyc and Dr. Oliffe. Dr. Saewyc is the Principle Investigator on this CIHR funded project and Drs. Oliffe and Butterwick are Co-Investigators.

The execution of the research and analysis of data for the part of the study featured in this dissertation was undertaken by Genevieve Creighton. The final manuscript was primarily authored by Genevieve, with significant editing support from Dr. Butterwick, Dr. Oliffe and Dr. Saewyc.

This research was conducted with approval from the University of British Columbia Behaviour Research Ethics Board. Approval certificate H09-03497.
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Maya Beckersmith, to whom my words following the loss of her partner could never be sufficient. I hope that this work can act as a partial legacy to your courage and tenacity.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The issue of young men’s injury and death due to accidents is of growing importance on the public health agenda. Referred to as the “dangerous demographic” (Barth, 2001), accidental death is, by a wide margin, the leading cause of death for young men 15–25, followed by suicide and homicide (Statistics Canada, 2005). A recent article in the Ottawa Citizen reported that, in a global trend, adolescent deaths have overtaken those of young children—largely due to the increase of deaths among young men through car accidents, reckless behaviour, violence and suicide (Kelland, 2011).

Injury and mortality that occurs by various risk activities traditionally has been the purview of epidemiologists. More recently, however, greater attention has been paid to the strong social and cultural influences on risk-taking. A critical gender analysis, for example, suggests that men engage in high-risk activities as a means to prove a masculinity that has been socially constructed as dominant (Connell, 1995; Grieg, 2009; Messerschmidt, 2001; Robertson, 2006). Because the dominant or hegemonic (Connell, 1995) masculinity that Western young men are expected to “prove” is narrowly construed as invincible, virile, and brave, they are more likely to do activities that are generally regarded as dangerous. Through performances of masculinity, young men incur a greater number of accidents, injury and deaths (De Visser, 2009; Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002; Kimmel, 2008).

Masculine risk-taking is deeply enculturated but the degree of support that young men receive for their engagement in risk is contingent on place and space. The meaning and value of risk-taking shifts according to the interests that dominate in these differential contexts. The recent Vancouver hockey riots, for example, in which large groups of
intoxicated young men attempted to destroy the downtown centre, is a poignant example of masculine risk engagement that was condemned by the mainstream social media (Walton, 2011). In this case, young men’s unrestrained performance of violence and hedonism was conceived of as a serious threat to individual and public well-being. In other situations, young men’s lack of consideration for personal safety is publically celebrated and seen as symbolic demonstration of freedom, courage and strength. The recent Olympic games that took place in the same city provide an excellent counterpoint. In contrast to the condemnation of men skiing out of bounds in the British Columbian mountains (CBC, 2009), thousands of people cheered as young men flew at break-neck speeds down mountain sides and off cliffs.

As evidenced by injury and mortality statistics, health promotion campaigns have had little effect in mediating young men’s risk engagement. This is likely due to the fact that, whether it is denounced or honoured, young masculinity is powerfully associated with risk-taking. It is also the case that, while there is research that describes young men’s risky practices, there is less consideration given to the points at which they choose to adapt these practices.

1.2 Motivation for this Research

It was two tragic events that occurred in the life of my family that guided a research concentration on young men, masculinities and risk-taking. On New Year’s Eve, almost five years ago, my stepdaughter’s fiancé drove off the road and tumbled down an embankment. He was badly injured and lay in a coma for nine weeks following the accident. Eventually he came to consciousness but the injury left him both fragile and vulnerable. Paul lived with a brain injury for a year and was plagued with anxiety and depression that he did not know
how to address. A year later, almost to the day of his previous accident, he drove over that same embankment and was killed.

Many were shocked and traumatized by the untimely death of this 23-year-old but it was his older brother Micah who suffered the most. He felt that he should have protected Paul and saved him from the sadness and helplessness that preceded his fatal accident. Micah began drinking heavily and using multiple prescription and non-prescription drugs. A few months after Paul’s death Micah’s younger sister found him dead in his apartment from a drug overdose.

While attending the funeral of a young person was a new experience for me, many of the young adults at Paul and Micah’s funerals were accustomed to these farewell gatherings. At one of the receptions I overheard two young women discussing the fact that, after getting a memorial tattoo for each deceased boyfriend, friend and family member, they were running out of body space.

In the months following these sudden deaths, I became sensitized to the issue of young men’s injury and mortality. Young men’s deaths to drunk driving, car surfing, back-country skiing and drug overdose had a persistent presence in the news. I was now personally aware of the heartbreak attached to each one of these individual deaths and I wondered how each young man’s friends and family were surviving the loss.

As a researcher with an orientation towards a gendered analysis, I also noticed the place of socially constructed masculinity in this phenomenon. It was inescapable to me that Paul and Micah’s fatal risk-taking was a performance of dominant masculinity. Paul’s fast driving and his inability to seek help following his accident emerged from his ideas about
what it meant to be a man. Micah’s overuse of substances was a masculine pain management strategy that enabled him to be stoic in his own time of mourning. In addition, constructions of masculinity were salient in the grief and grieving practices of male friends left behind.

There were few tears shed from Paul and Micah’s male friends attending the funeral.

As I observed the line of young men in dark suits, pain etched on their faces, I wondered if they were at a crossroads. After losing two members of their peer group by way of a risk activity that they too participated in did they reevaluate their own choices?

1.3 Research Gap

While no empirical evidence confirms this, mortality rates imply most young men will likely experience the death of a peer in adolescence or young adulthood. At an age when identity is forming and young men are crossing into adulthood, they will, almost certainly, know of someone in their cohort who has died by accident. Given this reality it is surprising that there is little research about young adults and grief following the loss of a friend. Presumably, the death of a friend is a significant life event for a young person but few studies describe the process and the outcome of these events. Similarly, the gendered nature of a young man’s grief has received somewhat minimal notice amid the great scholarly attention paid to grief and loss. While a few published articles (Balk, 1991; Noppe & Noppe, 2004) and a book chapter on grief in adolescence briefly reference gender (Adams, 2001), there is a paucity of study about how young men grieve the loss of someone close to them. Consequently, there is little empirical or theoretical evidence to contribute to an understanding of the way that young men respond to grief from the loss of a friend and, consequently, how to intervene in ways that foster healthy coping.
As reviewed in greater detail in Chapter Two, research on masculinity and health has increased over the past few years. While men and health research was previously characterized by an absence of theory, scholars are now taking up social and cultural theory and frameworks in order to explore and examine men’s health and well-being. Even still, there is great opportunity to extend a men’s health research from a theoretically informed perspective. There is a need to further study the way that socially dominant forms of masculinity intersect and are nuanced by class, ethnicity, community, sexual orientation, gender roles, culture, place and space in men’s gendered health practices (Creighton & Oliffe, 2010).

1.4 Research Purpose

The purpose for this research was to take an in-depth look at young men’s grief following the accidental death of a friend. Through the use of qualitative methods, this research asked participants to describe their grief following the loss of a male friend—how it touched their emotional worlds, how it changed the way that they thought about life and mortality and made decisions about how they would conduct their day-to-day life.

Through its design, this research is intended to side-step the homogenized or master narratives of masculinity and grief by having participants not only “tell” of their experiences but also to “show” it. Through the use of visual methods and photographs, men produced images that represented their relationship with their friend, metaphors for their own personal grief and loss, as well as pictorial images of their interpretations of masculinity.
1.5 Research Objectives

To contribute to the body of scholarly research on young men, masculinity and health, the primary objective of this study was to investigate the issue of men’s grief practices through the lens of critical social theory. As such, the theoretical objective was to develop a framework that brings together masculinities theory with Bourdieu’s theory of practice and Paetcher’s ideas of gendered communities of practice in order to explore the nuanced constructions and expressions of masculinities during and after an experience of loss. The empirical aim was to gather together the narrative accounts of young men’s experiences of losing a male friend to an accidental death and their experiences of grief.

The methodological objective was to explore the possibilities present in using a combination in-depth interviewing and photo elicitation to understand men’s grief experiences and constructions of masculinity. Accordingly, the goal of augmenting interviewing with visual methods was to add richness to the understanding of the plurality and multiplicities in young men’s narratives of grief and masculinities. In addition, the task of producing photographs was also intended to provide participants with the opportunity of creating a memorial for their friend. At the end of the interview they would have a collection of photographs that might constitute a legacy.

The first practical objective of this study was to provide professionals working with young men who regularly engage in high-risk practices with an expanded perspective on the linkages between masculinities, risk-taking and grief. It offers the notion that grief over loss represents a critical time of identity formation; intervention and support provided at this juncture may be fruitful. While a study of this size is not intended to reveal all of the many ways that men respond to the loss of a friend, it points to the idea that young men negotiate
grief and grief practices in a variety of ways. While dominant ideas of masculinity inform such practices, community norms and rituals can be far more influential. Strategies and interventions designed to shift young men’s health practices following the death of a friend should take this into account.

The second practical objective of this study was to affirm the idea that non-professionals, parents, friends and partners of young men play a critical role in providing support and in guiding critical self-reflection following a friend’s death. The variety of narratives present in this dissertation show that, while it takes many forms, the mentorship of others has a powerful influence on practices that contribute to health and general well-being.

1.6 Theory Building

The theoretical framework of this study benefited from the contributions from three theorists in addition to the work of a number of masculinity scholars, I used elements of theory asserted by Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler and Carrie Paechter as a way of developing an interview strategy, organizing and understanding the data. As discussed more fully in Chapter Two, in some cases these theoretical perspectives harmonized and augmented each other and in other cases I use an element of one theory to remedy, what I perceive as a shortcoming in understanding a specific phenomenon. While Bourdieu’s theory of practice was invaluable for understanding the ways in which habitus, field and capital influenced narratives of identity, for example, Paetcher’s Communities of Practice provided an explanatory framework for how one might shift one’s identity following the significant event of loss. Butler’s ideas about gender performance gave insight into the way that individuals draw on different narratives according to the differential social contexts.
1.7 Research Significance

This research is significant because it takes a novel approach to exploring the relationships between grief, risk and masculinity. Instead of solely examining practices, the research takes an integrated approach by investigating the social spaces that the research participant occupies, the shared practices that the research participants and their peer group engaged in, grief process and practices, and the construction and reconstruction of masculine identity. This research will make a contribution to the scholarship on masculinity studies by providing an account of nuanced ways that young men negotiate their own performances of masculinity in the face of socially dominant discourses of what it means to be a man. Building on previous work, this research extends an inquiry into the complex and often contradictory relationships between masculinities, grief and risk-taking.

1.8 Research Questions

The aim of this qualitative study is to explore the ways that participants grieve the loss of a male friend—how it touched their emotional worlds, how it changed the way that they thought about life and mortality and made decisions about how they would conduct their day-to-day life. As such, the research questions were as follows:

(1) How do young men cope with the loss of a male peer in accidental death caused by risky behaviours?
(2) How does such an accidental death influence men’s masculine ideals, and their alignment to those ideals?
(3) How do communities of practice reproduce a masculine identity through the performance of risk activities?
(4) How do men shift their risk-taking and health practices after the accidental death of a male peer?
1.9 Chapter Outlines

Chapter Two of this dissertation is a review of the literature that informed this study. It is divided into three sections beginning with a summary of the literature aimed at explaining men’s health practices from neural, evolutionary, socialization, and social constructionist perspectives. While using “risk practices” as a specific example, I argue that much of the literature takes up a positivistic perspective when attempting to explain why men put their health at risk. There is a notable absence of an analysis of power and privilege when speaking of relationships among men and between men and women. In order to provide a context for subsequent discussions of the grieving process, this section also provides a review of some of the clinical research on traumatic grief, highlighting the research focusing on young people.

In the second section I make a general case for how the application of three theoretical frameworks, used in tandem, can provide richness to an understanding of masculinities, grief and risk-taking. I begin with a detailed review of Bourdieu’s foundational theory of practice, some of its applications to the analysis of empirical data and a feminist critique. With a view to remedying the theory’s explanatory shortcomings, I turn to elements of Butler’s theory of gender performance and Paetcher’s ideas of gendered community of practice and the way that they can augment Bourdieu’s framework.

Chapter Three discusses the epistemological and ontological assumptions that guided the methodological approach to the study. In the first section of the chapter I outline my conceptual framework and offer a rationale for the use of combining qualitative methods. In the second section I go over the pragmatics of project preparation, recruitment and data collection. I provide a detailed accounting of data analysis and the emergent thematic
categories. In the final section I address some of the ethical and reflexive issues that came up over the course of the study.

Chapter Four is the first chapter of empirical findings. As in chapters five and six, Chapter Four presents an analysis of interview findings alongside photos that serve to both enhance and nuance the key findings. Through answering the research question “How do young men cope with the loss of a male peer an accidental death caused by risky behaviours?” Chapter Four provides an account of the emotional, cognitive and psychological responses that participants experienced following the death of a friend. It begins with participants’ descriptions of what they experienced as grief from the moment they first found out to the months or even years after the death. Throughout the chapter I discuss the way that grief practices are intricately connected to the norms produced within one’s community of practice. Both social and local discourses of masculinity intersect with individuals’ personal experiences of loss and grief to create a performance of masculine grief.

In Chapter Five, men’s narratives are explored with specific regard to the death stories told by participants. Through answering the research question “How does such an accidental death influence men’s masculine ideals, and their alignment to those ideals?” I discuss the differential ways that participants situate the death and the various ways they interpret it. The community of practice, habitus and social space, informed by dominant social beliefs about the value assigned to an individual’s life, guide the symbolic meaning that participants make of their friends death.
In Chapter Six I first explore the question: “How do communities of practice reproduce a masculine identity through the performance of risk activities?” Secondly, I discuss the way that grief, in the aftermath of a friend’s death, serves as a liminal space in which masculine identities and practices can be reconstituted. By way of the research question “How do men shift their risk-taking and health practices after the accidental death of a male peer?” I investigate the role that participants’ communities of practice played in facilitating or discouraging a shift in masculine practices and identity. In this chapter I look at how one’s habitus is profoundly influential in the shaping of what it means to take a risk or have a masculine identity that lends itself to performances of risk.

In Chapter Seven, the concluding chapter, I furnish a broader discussion of the theoretical and methodological implications of the key findings and make recommendations for research and practice in the field of young men and risk-taking. I discuss how, at the critical time of grief, dominant forms of masculinity both provide a protection for men and also deeply troubles them. I take up again, the ‘troubled’ notions of risk and masculinities and the way that they can be reinterpreted from a critical perspective.

1.10 Operational Definitions

Adolescent/Young men: The men that I have interviewed (aged 19–25 years) are in a transitional time between being a teenager and becoming an adult. While what constitutes adolescence is differentially defined across various disciplines and sectors, it is most often used to refer to those under 20 and over 12 years of age. Over the course of this research I have found that many of the social, psychological and identity issues traditionally assigned to those in their late teens, also apply to young adults in their early 20s. Kimmel (2008) makes the argument that this extended adolescence is due to a variety of associated factors. Due to
the exceptionally high rates of young unemployment, large populations of young people in North America are un- or under-employed—necessitating a reliance on parents and relations for primary economic support. Many still live at home. It is a social trend is for young men to delay marriage/common-law relationships until they are in their thirties and a cultural one is for men to spend their mid-late twenties engaging in the pasttimes formerly reserved for those much younger than themselves (Kimmel, 2008). For this reason, in the review of literature, I will use the terms adolescent and young men interchangeably.

*Communities of Practice*: I use this term throughout the dissertation to indicate the dominant peer groups in which young men participate in and identify with. Communities of practice is a theoretical lens that proposes through the transmission of norms, values and practices, communities function as a mechanism for the construction of gendered identity. As Paechter (2003) contends, communities of practice are central in producing and reproducing masculine practices and identities.

Peer groupings are most often composed of individuals with similar habitus and common interests. The social spaces that communities of practice occupy play a significant role in shaping masculine norms and values.

*Grief/Traumatic Grief*: I use this term to indicate the period following the loss of a friend. While there is a symptomology attached to its scientific definition, I am using in its broadest sense—to signify a wide range of responses. While grief also has biological and psychological attributes, the way grief is experienced is influenced by the life history of the individual, their habitus, gender and gender relations as they intersect with culture, class and history. The sociological accounts of grief and grieving focus on the symbolic constructions
and meanings that are informed and disrupted by death, ever-present yet emerging as a constellation of dynamics shaping grief-related experiences.

*Risk-taking practice:* This term signifies activities that individuals voluntarily engage in that present a higher than average opportunity for injury or death to be incurred. These activities include, but are not limited to, skiing/snowboarding out of bounds, “extreme” climbing or mountain biking, the use of drugs and alcohol to the point of intoxication, fighting and “train jumping”. Because terms such as *risk* and *voluntary* are contested, I will take them up in greater detail throughout this dissertation.

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1 Testing one’s speed and reflexes by standing on the train tracks, jumping out of the way when the train comes close.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: to summarize the key literature on young men and risk practices and to propose an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for examining gendered risk practices. The literature review is intended to explain the context from which current men’s health research has arisen and to demonstrate the limitations of past research. It will describe the move from positivistic, biological explanations of young men’s risk-taking to the development of a social science interpretation that elucidates the interplay between masculinities and health practices. This will be followed by a short review of the relevant literature on risk practices and traumatic grief in young people. The second section of this chapter proposes a theoretical model based on key elements of Bourdieus’s critical social theory with contributions from masculinities theorists, Judith Butler and elements taken from Paechter’s ideas of gendered communities of practice. It will begin with a consideration of the discursive formation that construes young men’s lifestyle and health practices as a ‘crisis.’ In the third section I will review some of the relevant methodological literature that guided the creation of the research approach outlined more fully in Chapter Three.

2.2 Setting a Stage for Young Men’s Health Research

Researchers, health professionals, and policy-makers have expressed concern about what they consider the growing crisis of men’s ill health (Bilsker, Goldenberg, & Davison, 2010; Courtenay, 2009; de Guerre, 2011; Grieg, 2009; Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010; Oliffe et al., 2010). The grey and scholarly journals quote statistics of men’s shorter lifespan, men’s higher mortality rates for the top 15 causes of death (including cancer and heart disease) and

While building a compelling argument for greater attention to men’s health and well-being, these statistics can generally be linked to aging and the lifestyle factors (overwork, overeating and under-exercising) that break down the physical self. Young men too, however, are cause for concern and can be counted as vulnerable when relating mortality rates to biological sex. For example, in western countries, males between the ages of 15 and 29 have a 2.6 times greater risk of dying than females (Phillips, 2005), and are 3.9 times more likely to experience accidental death from motor vehicle accident, substance overuse, homicide, suicide, sports accidents, and so forth (Statistics Canada, 2005).

While older men are often stereotyped as exhibiting a manly disregard for their personal health, this negative label is balanced by a cultural recognition of their contributions to society. They are seen as the breadwinners, the providers and the stoic strength that give structure to the social web. The young men of today have no such discursive lifeline. In his recent book Guyland, Michael Kimmel (2008) argues that social, economic, and cultural institutions have produced a generation of men who are “guys” without long-term relationships, career prospects, independent living arrangements, or mature ideas about sex and sexuality. This “guy” stage extends well beyond the traditional delineation of adolescence into their mid- and late-20s. Kimmel and others suggest that a large number of young men, from no one cultural or economic grouping, engage in a series of negative behaviours in order to fulfill stereotypes about what it means to be a man (Frosh. et al., 2002; Kimmel, 1997, 2008; Nobis & Sanden, 2008). Citing the example of homo-social
environments such as fraternities, locker rooms, and bachelor pads, Kimmel (2008) contends that young men are encouraging each other to enact risk practices, harmful to self and other.

How did it come to be that young men, who have historically occupied a place of high esteem within many cultures, have descended to this lowly position? Two widely read books *Real Boys* (Pollack, 1998) and *Raising Cain* (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999) hold parents, school systems, and culture accountable for providing boys with very narrow pathways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Enforcement of what Pollack (1998, p. 45) refers to as the “boy code” has deprived boys and young men of the linguistic and emotional foundations that create the basis for healthy relationships. This, the authors remark, has provided fertile ground for internalizing behaviours such as depression and externalizing behaviours such as violence and suicide. McManis (2003) makes the claim that boys and young men are alienated from the education system, which fuels lower self-esteem and academic performance. The early deprivation of boys, say these authors, is the foundation for the “crisis of masculinity” that emerges when boys become young men.

### 2.3 Theories of Young Men’s Risk Practices—Biology And Brain

It is only recently, however, that young men’s risk-taking behaviour has been construed as a crisis. While stopping short of celebrating young men’s excessive risk-taking, many socio-biologists conceived of it as developmentally normative. Over a century ago, in his seminal work *Adolescence*, G. Stanley Hall (1904) commented that “a period of semi criminality is normal for all healthy boys. . . . [T]hose whose surroundings are bad will continue it, but others will grow away from it as they approach maturity” (p. 404). He argued that the accelerated development of adolescence spawns a craving for intense feelings and experiences.
Hall’s views were reflective of the biological and evolutionary frameworks of the time in which anatomical sex played a primary role in determining health/risk practices (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Wilson, 1975, 1978). Evolutionary-based research explicated the sex behaviour discrepancy on different reproductive strategies, hormonal profiles, and brain structures (Connell, 2002; Kemper, 1990; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Wilson, 1975) and located male aggression and risk-taking as a biological trait—a “natural” extension of maleness (Archer, 1991; Banks & Dabbs, 1996; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Wilson & Daly, 1993). Said another way, risk-taking and violence, whether in the context of social, sexual or sports activities, have been positioned as inevitable outcomes of male biology (Campbell, 1999; Pawlowski & Atwal, 2008; Wilson & Daly, 1993).

More recently, psychologists and scientists have sought to understand male risk-taking from a cognitive perspective. Risk-taking could be a mechanism for resolving the cognizant dissonance between the vibrancy of youth and the anxiety surrounding the possibility and ultimate imminence of death (Thorson & Powell, 1994). Taking risks in the form of extreme sports, dangerous drugs, fighting, and binge drinking—and living to tell of them—allows the young person to look death in the face and walk away (Noppe & Noppe, 2004).

Steinberg (2007) attributes adolescent risk to neural function. His research demonstrated that the brain is not fully developed until an individual has aged well into his or her 20s. The parts of the brain responsible for exercising judgment regarding risky behavior are still developing at the same time that the brain regions that mediate a desire for sensation-seeking are fully activated (Steinberg, 2007). Additionally, adolescents are in the process of developing the ability to think abstractly, to understand different perspectives, to
conceptualize the future, and to see the grey areas between accounts of right and wrong. As a result, adolescents (particularly male adolescents) are developmentally challenged in understanding the consequences of actions involved with risky behaviours (Cobb, 2004).

2.4 **Sex, Gender and Social Construction**

In contrast to scholarship on male risk-taking that makes exclusive reference to patterns of biology and brain function, gender theories aimed to integrate, to varying extents, the interrelationship of individual psychology, family, community, culture and institutional discourse. Theories of gender can be traced back to the work of psycho-analysts such as Freud, Chodorow and Dinnerstein who critiqued the utility of the male–female binary. They theorized that, far from being a predetermined product of biological sources, masculine and feminine behaviours are outcomes of the complex workings of the psyche. Bem’s (1974) seminal scholarship furthered the denaturalisation of gender through her work on socialization and sex role typology. She argued that western cultures were so powerfully gendered that even young children take on dominant notions of sex-typed behaviour.

The advent of sex role socialization theory provided inspiration to scholars interested in the intersections between masculinity and men’s health. Research emerged that examined the ways in which stereotypic male practices had significant influence on health and illness (Messner, 1997; Sabo, 2000). In his paper, *Warning: The Male Sex Role May Be Dangerous to Your Health*, Harrison (1978) presented a synthesis of scholarly works to demonstrate the strong negative influence of male socialization on men’s health. Building on the literature about male socialization and health, the research attributed men’s avoidance of health care services to masculine norms that emphasize self-reliance and stoicism (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). The discrepancies between male and females sex roles also were implicated in men’s health.
health. It was argued that the pressure placed on young men, for example, to break with the maternal ‘apron strings’ and demonstrate their autonomy and courage led many men to engage in risky practices such as substance misuse, extreme sports and aggression.

Social constructionism was developed to conceptualize gender as actively constructed and produced, intersecting with culture, social class and history (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Gerson & Preiss, 1985). Key was Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) work in hegemonic masculinities, a dominant positioning that subordinates femininities as well as other forms of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinities constituted idealized patterns of practice and power both materially and discursively and, although few men embody those ideals, many men are deeply invested in sustaining them (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In the context of men’s health, hegemonic masculinities, as normative performances, idealize men as robust, autonomous and self-reliant rather than concerned with self-health, illness or injury (De Visser, 2009; Kimmel, 1997). Recognising that masculinity is intertwined with various social locations, the theory of multiple masculinities emerged to describe men’s varying alignments to health practices, some of which are synonymous with hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 2005). Marginalized and subordinate were the poor, working-class, racially oppressed and homosexual men, identities bordered and contained by White and upper/middle-class hegemony. The plurality of masculinities within, as well as across, men revealed diverse locale-dependent ‘configurations of practice’ (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Courtenay (2000) first adapted Connell’s (1995) framework to predict how various alignments, including subordinate and marginalized masculinities, might emerge in the context of men’s health and illness. Courtenay (2000) argued that health practices were
mediated by and expressed through men’s masculine performances within specific settings. Proving one’s manhood, then, involved enacting masculine strength, power, and disregard for danger (Capraro, 2000; Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1997). De Visser (2009), for example, suggests that young men’s binge-drinking is an example of men aligning with masculine ideals. Being drunk can negatively impact both men’s and women’s health through linked practices including aggression, violence, predatory heterosexuality, motor vehicle accidents and sexual assault. Men’s idealized health practices also disallowed their engagement with feminine self-care practices, such as applying sunscreen (Courtenay 2000).

Courtenay and Keeling (2000) pointed out that, just as there are deep disparities of privilege among men, the influence of hegemonic masculinities on health can be seen to be applied differentially. They described a health hierarchy whereby privileged men maintained and defended their social power, while marginalized men endured the most compromised health. Courtenay (2000) claimed strong connections between social location and the performance of idealized masculine health practices. For example, in order to contest subordinate status and reaffirm their masculinity, men amplified their risk-taking and engaged in activities such as crime and substance abuse (Courtenay 2000). Building on this, De Visser and Smith (2006) explained that the degree to which young men binge-drink is inversely related to the number of other currencies of masculinity that they possess. A young man who is athletic, for example, does not necessarily need to drink heavily to prove his manhood (De Visser, 2009; deVisser & Smith, 2006). Masculinities researchers also assert that improving men’s health and well-being rests, not only on prompting men to embrace healthy practices, but by unsettling structures that maintain hegemonic masculinity itself (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1997; Messerschmidt, 1993a). Said another way, understanding the
how masculinities connect to men’s health requires a theoretical framework that accounts for both the agency of an individual in making health choices and the social structures that shape those options.

2.5 Limitations in Men’s Health Literature

As useful as Courtenay’s (2000, 2009) masculinity frame was for analyzing men’s masculine health practices in a variety of contexts, understandings have been limited by insufficiently nuanced accounts of social location and a lack of attention to men’s gender and class relations. While applying Connell’s (1995) multiple masculinities, Courtenay (2000) did not sufficiently account for men’s individual meaning-making and relationships. Assumed, and arguably reified here are subordinate masculinities which, in the absence of empirical data, inadvertently reproduce hegemonic discourses about marginalized populations (Thompson, 2006). Absent in Courtenay’s theory are the nuanced ways that men experience masculine roles and gender relations in the context of a variety of intersecting identities. So, while marginalized men attempt to “prove” their masculinity, the meaning of the phenomenon is imbued with many levels of significance including aligning with cultural values, attending to family traditions and responding to media characterizations of masculinity.

Depicting hegemonic masculinities as having uniform and unitary meanings and negative influence within and across men’s lives is short on both theoretical savvy and empirical weight by failing to look at structural issues of race, class, ability and sexuality. In addition, as Sloan, Gough and Conner (2009) confirm, the idea that men attempting to embody hegemonic masculine ideals results in negative health behaviours and outcomes is overly simplistic. Indeed, Sloan et al. demonstrate that men enacting positive health
behaviours, such as drinking less alcohol and reducing fat intake, also draw on discursive elements of hegemonic masculinity. By making choices dedicated to preserving a healthy body, men can and do situate themselves as rational, decisive and autonomous manly men, promoting their own health and the health of others (Oliffe et al., 2010).

2.5.1 Gender Relations

Much of the work on men, masculinities and health has failed to integrate gender relations approaching men’s health issues in ways that examine interactions and relations between and within gender categories—both at the micro level and in the context of social and cultural positioning (Schofield et al., 2000; Smith & Robertson, 2008). To its detriment the rallying cry to improve men’s health has been that women’s health has received an “over focus”—the pendulum has swung too far. In addition, connecting men’s health practices to agency and/or structure has tended to trump men’s peer, partner and parental relationships, despite the widespread acknowledgment that “significant others” strongly influence men’s health practices (Lee & Owens, 2002; Robertson, 2007). Gendered divisions between domestic and public spheres anchored “wives” and “mothers” as the private caretakers of health for the men and children in their lives (Lee & Owens, 2002) amid male breadwinners who laboured selflessly outside the domestic sphere (Schofield et al., 2000).

Situating young men’s health in patterns of gender relations gives new insight into discourses of a pendulum swing or panic (Frank, Kehler, Lovell, & Davidson, 2003; Schofield et al., 2000). Kimmel (2008) and Frank, Kehler, Lovell, and Davison (2003) have argued that, while authors such as Pollack, Kindlon and Thompson provide a thoughtful and insightful comment on the circumstances of young men, their portrayal of the crisis in masculinity masks the privileges embedded in the practices of masculinity and avoids an
analysis of the gender relations inherent in the production of masculinity. In a related critique, McMahon (1993) and Hearn (2004) take masculinity studies to task for ignoring individual agency by masking the actual practices of men. Hearn (2004) argues that in the prolific call for masculinity to be “re-defined,” “reconstructed,” “dismantled,” or “transformed,” there is insufficient wondering about how men should change their behaviours (p. 80). McMahon and Hearn have both argued that, in order to change the social order that currently privileges White men, there must be a move away from exclusive dependence on theoretical models such as hegemonic masculinity. Instead, there must be a profound acknowledgement of the ways in which men privileged by their race, class and ability benefit from the set of practices that they employ. While is true that young men are caught in a contradiction in which they suffer pressure to conform to narrow versions of masculinity, they can take advantage of social arrangements that privilege them (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1998).

Relations between men are also gendered. As queer theorists are quick to point out, gender is formed at the intersection of sex, sexuality, race, and class. Kimmel (1994) has argued that homophobia is the central organizing principle of manhood. Many adolescent males spend an inordinate amount of energy persuading their peers of their heterosexuality (Frank, et al., 2003; Nayak & Kehily, 1996; Pascoe, 2007). Through displays of strength and risk-taking, disparaging remarks about women and other men, and engaging in conversations that affirm toughness and competitiveness, some young men create a convincing performance of heterosexual masculinity (Pascoe, 2007). In more extreme cases violence is targeted towards those whose heterosexuality is suspect or who insinuate a lack of heterosexual masculinity in another (Kimmel, 2003). A Statistics Canada study (2008)
reported that hate crimes against the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered) community doubled over those numbered in the previous year—three quarters of the crimes violent in nature and six out of ten committed by those between the ages of 12 and 22.

2.6 Risk

The practice of risk-taking is a central component of this dissertation. Risk, however, is a term taken up in a number of disciplines reliant on different ontological underpinnings. Taylor-Gooby and Zinn (2006) maintain that the various perspectives on risk-taking differ in understandings as to whether risk can be objectively calibrated or if it is primarily constructed by way of individual, social or cultural processes. Positivistic assessments of risk are most common in the scientific and technical fields in an attempt to identify the hazards and dangers most likely to cause harm. The public health practice that emerges from this perspective seeks primarily to modify health/risk attitudes and choices.

This dissertation takes a constructionist approach to risk, focusing on the way that culture, community, affect, and discourse converge to influence one’s perception of what is “risky.” While there are activities that do present a greater possibility of injury or death, only certain ones are made salient to public concern. The extent to which events are covered and the linguistic devises used to situate danger are highly influential in creating a perception of risk (Gardner, 2008). In addition, this study takes up a social constructionist perspective by focusing on the role that social discourses play in sanctioning definitions of health and risk (Foucault, 1981; Lupton, 1999). Individuals, and especially young or poor people, who cannot or choose not to enact “healthy” behaviours are considered risk-takers and face social marginalization (Shoveller & Johnson, 2006). As will be discussed throughout the findings
of this study, dominant social ideas about gender, race, class and age are powerful mediators in how young men conceive of their own risk-taking and that of their peer group.

This study is premised on the idea that communities of practice function to produce relevant norms regarding risk and risk practices. A model for understanding young men’s risk-taking from this perspective is one developed by Kahan, Braman, Gastil, Slovic and Mertz (2007). They use cultural theory of risk perception (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982; Rayner, 1992) and the psychological mechanism of identity protective cognition to provide a comprehensive explanation of why some people are more risk-sensitive than others. Briefly, this theoretical lens uses Douglas’s (1970) model that measures the degree to which one’s world views are hierarchal versus egalitarian, individualistic versus communal. An individualistic orientation is competitive and encompasses a “fend for yourself” approach, whereas a communitarian view values interdependency and solidarity. A hierarchical view is premised on the idea that opportunities and resources should be allocated in accordance with sex, class, ethnicity and lineage. Kahan et al. (2007) argue that a discrete group of the most privileged White males who share individualistic and hierarchal values, are much less risk-sensitive than minority men and women. They do not subscribe to the idea that the dangers of the world will affect them. He describes the “White male effect” as a way of processing information about risk (discounting it) to protect their own identity. While, by virtue of age and income level, participants in this study did not qualify for this discrete group of White men, this theory does point to the idea that the way in which men consider their communal identity (and the material resources that support it) does contribute to their orientation to risk-taking.
2.7 Grief

There has been much scholarship from a variety of disciplinary perspectives on the issue of grief and grieving. I have focused on the area of scholarship of adolescent and gendered grief, an area that has been studied in only a cursory fashion.

Researchers who have focused on traumatic grief following the loss of a loved one from a psychological perspective have documented the way that grief can broadly influence our thinking and feeling, outlook on life, and health and spiritual beliefs (Jacobs & Prigerson, 2000; Martin & Doka, 2000; Prigerson et al., 1997; Ritchie, 2003). Much of this body of work is drawn from the attachment scholarship of Bowlby (1982) who suggests that it is adaptive for humans to form significant bonds with others in order to foster growth and development. There are physical, affective, cognitive, behavioural and spiritual responses in the grief outcomes of separation and loss of those with whom she or he has formed this significant attachment (Barbato & Irwin, 1992; Bowlby, 1951; Kandt, 1994).

Traumatic grief is a condition that often follows the death of a significant other. Common manifestations of traumatic grief include separation distress (longing for the deceased and excessive loneliness resulting from the loss), intrusive thoughts about the loss, feelings of numbness, disbelief about the loss, being stunned or dazed and having a fragmented sense of security and trust (Jacobs, Mazure, & Prigerson, 2000). The constellation of traumatic grief symptoms is associated with impaired role performance, functional impairment and low self-esteem. It is predictive of substantial morbidity through high rates of cancer; cardiac disorders; increased drug, alcohol and tobacco consumption; and suicidality (Jacobs et al., 2000; Prigerson et al., 1997; Prigerson et al., 1994). Traumatic
grief can shake one’s belief that the world is a safe place even when no previous sense of vulnerability, depression or anxiety existed in the bereaved (Jacobs. et al., 2000).

The phenomenon of traumatic grief, distinct from anxiety and depression, has not been well studied in young people. Most of what is known about the condition is garnered from research done with adults who are bereaved due to the loss of a spouse or child. There has been almost no research on young people who have had a peer die accidentally (Balk, 1991). What is well established is increased suicidality in the young person who has had a friend commit suicide (Melhem et al., 2004; Prigerson. et al., 1994).

2.7.1 Men and Grief

While loss is signified by a specific definition of grief, individuals endure the process in different ways. Psychologists attribute this to individuals’ dominant response tendencies or their “natural” orientation to processing life events. A person’s response tendency could be more affective, with an inclination towards emotion and the seeking of support from others; or instrumental, with a greater tendency towards evaluating events cognitively and attempting to rationally consider the implications for their life. Still others are more oriented to a physical response—a propensity to process grief through doing a physical activity of some sort.

A constructionist perspective centers on the way individuals interpret and reflect on the symbolic meaning of the loss. This is bound up in familial and cultural traditions of grief, social location, gender and communities of practice (Gilbert, 1996). Patterns of grief have been explicitly gendered. Dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity designated “affective” styles as being appropriate and expected in women, while masculine grief
patterns are more often instrumental. Shamir and Travis (2002) note that the division of masculinity and femininity is along the lines of expression of emotion, women as sentimental and expressive and men as stoic, rugged and emotionally removed. Both men’s and women’s liberation movements have sought to shift these traditional, western grief patterns, arguing that “repression” delays or arrests men’s ability to reconcile tragic loss in a healthy way. Even still, Shamir and Travis (2002) make the point that “what is remarkable about this narrative and its variations is not simply its historical resilience, but the extent to which it has survived its own critique” (p. 2). As the literature attests, men are often lacking in vocabulary to depict feelings of sadness, loneliness, depression and hurt (Oliffe, 2010; Oliffe, Bottorff, Kelly, & Halpin, 2008; Oliffe & Mroz, 2005)

2.8 Literature Review Summary

In summary, my review of the literature points to five important ideas that will guide the focus of this dissertation:

1. While there has been a great deal of research that describes men’s health and well-being when it comes to risk behaviours, there has been little documentation of that which facilitates a shift toward more positive behaviours.
2. A gender relations approach is necessary to understand men’s construction of masculinity.
3. A nuanced approach to hegemonic masculinities and its relationship to health/risk practices is important for health research.
4. Risk and risk-taking are contested terms, determined by place, space and relations of power.
5. Grief in young men has been an understudied phenomenon.
2.9 Creating an Interdisciplinary Theoretical Lens

This study, as will be illuminated in greater detail in the following chapters, investigates how young men make sense of their own risk-taking behaviours following loss of a male peer. How do the tragic events affect men’s ideas about their own performance of masculinity and alignment to the masculine ideals of their peer group?

Constructs of grief, masculinity and identity are multilayered. They are discursive—the formations of social institutions, gender and cultural norms. They are material, situated in the body and the physical realities of race, ethnicity, wealth and poverty, neighbourhood, ability and sexuality. They are relational, shaped by community, family and peers. They also have elements of the spiritual. While such entanglements might not be captured in a quantitative survey or structured interview format, in a qualitative study using both arts-based and semistructured methods of inquiry, the enmeshments are data products in themselves, providing valuable insights into the research questions.

I will explore four pathways into grief, risk and masculinity:

(1) The social spaces that the research participant occupied
(2) The shared practices that the research participants and their peer group of communities engaged in
(3) Grief process and practices
(4) The construction and re-construction of masculine identity.

While each of these inquiries are rich in and of themselves, I was primarily interested in understanding how they intersect to elicit data on masculine health and risk practices.

This research—at the points of design, data gathering and analysis—was reliant on contributions made by the masculinities theorists referenced in the previous section with...
particular attention to Connell’s (1995) theories of hegemonic and multiple masculinities. In addition, the theoretical framework is informed by the work of social theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1978, 1993) who offered a framework of analysis that combined the ideas of *field*, *capital*, and *habitus* to account for the ways in which the accumulation of various currencies of power facilitates the formation of identity and mobility within social spaces. I draw on Butler’s (1988, 1990a) work regarding gender performance and Paechter’s theorizing of gendered communities of practice to work with reconstruction of young men’s masculinity at the time of critical loss.

2.9.1 Locating Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu was a French sociologist who, by way of his challenge to many canonical western philosophical ideas along with his commitment to public and political life, came to be known as the “anti-intellectual intellectual.” His theories were seen as one of the primary contests to the dominating post-structural theories of the day. Bourdieu is perhaps best known in sociology for his “Theory of Practice.” In this framework he articulated processes of habitus, capital and field that explained the ways in which individuals are both constituted by, and constituting of, social structure. In the following sections I briefly describe these foundational ideas.

Bourdieu’s central idea was that individuals or “social agents” are socialized via the mechanisms of *habitus*—the inculcation of schemas of perception, thought and reflexes created in response to structures of class, familial environment and social space. Habitus is commonly referred to as the “feel for the game” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and the lens through which one filters and creates interpretations of social situations.
The agent engaged in practice knows the world but with a knowledge which is not set up in the relation of externality of a knowing consciousness. He [or she] knows it, in a sense, too well, without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he [or she] inhabits it like a garment (un habit) or a familiar habitat. (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 142)

Central to the notion of habitus is that one’s beliefs, assumptions and behaviours in the world are not simply the result of individual personality, but largely structured by locations of class, race and gender. The unconscious consumption of values, belief systems and rules acculturates individuals into socially arranged groupings.

The field is the regulated social space in which one takes on habitus (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 89). Each field is characterized by unique sets of practices and governed by internal structures of power. While influenced by more institutionalized forms of power—such as media, political regimes or religion—each field maintains its own unique logic and set of meanings. Activities, language, and social practices are contextually framed and carry with them unique implications (Powell, 2008). While the term “rules of the game” is often invoked to describe the way that each field is defined and governed, Bourdieu was careful to differentiate it from the structural or objectivist accounts. The social agent, within any given field, is living within a matrix of regularities that include assumed hierarchies, traditions, standards for communication, style of dress and so forth. Bourdieu used the term doxa to describe taken for granted assumptions and understandings. The degree to which a social agent has a feel for the doxa is, in turn, determined by an individual’s habitus. It is pervasive and yet it is not perceived.

The relationships between habitus and field underlies the idea of social reproduction and explains the replication of lifestyle, power structures and social practices outside of overt
mechanisms of regulation (Veenstra, 2007). Bourdieu and his colleague Passaron (1977) use the example of the university to elucidate how social spaces reproduce themselves. They discuss how countless factors during the formation of habitus shape the outlooks, beliefs, and practices of social agents. For middle-class young people, their habitus creates a natural fit in the university setting. They expect and are expected to find comfort and familiarity in a social space designed to further their mental capacity and launch them on a path much like that of their educated parents. Working-class young people are much less likely to feel “at home” in this middle-class environment. They are not conditioned to believe that they can contribute to life in the ivory tower, nor that their future will be enhanced by a university education. While there are no objective structures barring working-class individuals from university, they are more likely to relegate themselves out of the system. This is related to Bourdieu’s concept of “positional suffering,” which holds that, in general, we will adjust our expectations to what we understand are our objective chances (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 217).

An initial reading of habitus and field might indicate a simple cause and effect relationship between the two. One’s field forms one’s habitus which, in turn, determines one’s life course. The social processes that form ones inherited and dialectically shaped dispositions, however, are laden with complexity (McNay, 2000; Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu believed that culture, material conditions and class structure intersect to bring about “conditions of freedom” that, in turn, dictate the degree to which one can stray from one’s trajectory. While he maintained that individuals are social actors, they have agency only so far as habitus and structure will allow.

To illustrate the complexity within the theory of practice, Maton (2008) states that “each social field of practice (including society as a whole) can be understood as a
competitive game of ‘field of struggles’ in which social agents strategically improvise in their quest to maximize their position” (p. 31). Where one is located in the social space or field that she or he occupies is determined the amount of capital in his or her possession. Bourdieu (1986) delineated the major forms of capital that contribute to one’s ability to negotiate social spaces. Economic or material capital is somewhat self-evident and includes monetary resources, income, and inherited wealth. Additional forms, however, such as social, cultural and symbolic capital also function to establish the power and status of an individual within the social space.

It is through the notion of multiple forms of capital that Bourdieu departs from more structurally oriented theorists such as Marx and Levi-Strauss (Bourdieu, 1985). He notes that one’s economic capital results in an objective position in a given social space. The accumulation of wealth and other material possessions gives one a portfolio of capital that determines the degree of influence that one is able to exercise. Between social spaces, however, the notion of capital becomes more complex. Power and status, however, are not only derived from material capital but through the possession of social, cultural and symbolic capital. In brief, cultural capital can consist of skills, educational qualifications, and competencies, as well as dispositions of the mind and body. Social capital is the system of networks of which one is a part. Symbolic capital represents the form that all capital takes when it is legitimated as hegemonic within certain contexts.

As the findings of this study highlight, concepts of field (place and space) are of utmost importance in the accounting of cultural, social and material capital. As participants from a variety of different communities told their stories, it became evident that what counts as capital among university students is far different from that among snow boarders in a
resort community and, in turn, among young people living on the urban streets. The fields that participants occupied and the various forms of capital in their possession were influential in determining what was considered valued and acceptable performances of masculinities, as well as the function and meaning of masculine risk-taking. In addition, while economic capital is a transferable currency, important social and cultural capital in one field was not necessarily meaningful in another, making it challenging for individuals to make major life changes. Ultimately, habitus, capital and field prevailed as mattering when participants considered adapting performances of risk and masculinities.

Bourdieu’s (1993) foundational ideas about structure and culture and the conditions of freedom have been criticized for obscuring human agency and the mediating influence of social settings (Crossley, 2001; Dillabough, 2004). While there are durable systems of domination, post-structural spatial theorists have contended that an examination of place and space is essential to understanding power’s complexities (Aitken, 2001; Nayak & Kehily, 1996). In addition, this theoretical framework leaves little room for an analysis of what Messner (1997) described as “internal fissures, contradictions, and disagreements within seemingly coherent and stable groups” (p. 90). It lacks a discussion of the creative individual who acts in ways contrary to expectations attached to his or her capital and habitus (Crossley, 2001; Kennelly, 2008).

In contrast, feminist authors such as McNay (2000), Skeggs (1997) and Huppatz (2006), argue that a closer reading of Bourdieu reveals that, when it comes to an analysis of class, his framework is not wholly deterministic. As McNay (2000) argues, habitus is portrayed as being in dynamic relationship with the field. The field may create the habitus but habitus (embodied by the individual) also constructs the field through an endowment of
meaning and value (McNay, 2000). In addition, because habitus only materializes through engagement in the social field, when it encounters new situations or crises there is the potential for new and creative outcomes that are neither certain nor predetermined (Bourdieu, 2001; Powell, 2008).

What many of Bourdieu’s feminist supporters do agree on, however, is that his analysis of gender does not incorporate the same nuances that he imbues in his analysis of class (Huppatz, 2006; McNay, 2000). His overly deterministic concept of gender makes it difficult for many gender theorists to fully apply Bourdieu’s framework (Lovell, 2000; Powell, 2008). Crawshaw (2004), for instance, concludes that for working-class young men “it is difficult if not impossible to act outside of this limited field of practice” (p. 239).

Bourdieu is also criticized by feminist and queer theorists for seemingly taking the position that masculinity and femininity are necessarily attached to male and female sex, a departure from his central notion regarding the reproduction of habitus.

2.10 Butler and Gender Performance

Huppatz (2006) and McNay (2000) along with Lovell (2000) suggest that Bourdieu’s analysis of gender is improved with a conception of a gender that is more dynamic. Judith Butler (1990) offers this by proposing that a stable gender identity does not exist in an objective form but is constituted by the action of a subject. She argues that, like a piece of theatre, gender is brought into being through a repetitive process of inscription, rehearsal, and performance (Butler, 1990a). Butler’s theory, however, goes beyond a simple acting out of one’s gender.

In opposition to theatrical or phenomenological models which take the gendered self to be prior to its acts, I will understand constituting acts not only as constituting the
identity of the actor, but as constituting that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of belief. (Butler, 1990b, p. 271)

A primary premise of this research is that masculinity is not a stable identity but one that is performed differentially in various contexts. Engagement in risk practices, for example, is a way of performing masculinity and thereby constituting a gendered identity. The gendered way that one grieves and talks about grief is another way of performing masculinity. While communities play a powerful role in constructing these performances, they are not immutable.

2.11 The Absence of Agency

As a variety of scholars have argued, the limitation of Bourdieu and Butler is an insufficient theorizing of the subject (Crossley, 2001; Dillabough, 2004; McNay, 2000; Skeggs, 1997). Bourdieu avoids the matter of the subject altogether by conceptualizing the individual as a coming together of social processes and history (Dillabough, 2004). Butler, in effect, dismisses the individual’s active and often critical negotiation of gender thereby negating any form of subjectivity (Nelson, 1999).² While Butler addresses the notion of intentionality and purposefulness in her later book Bodies That Matter (Butler, 1993) she does not reconcile these ideas within her theories of gender performance (Nelson, 1999). Change, according to Butler, occurs only through “unintentional slippage.” As critics of meta narratives agree, there must be a place for agency that does not require a subject who neither exists as a product of habitus and field, nor is solely constituted by discourse.

² Bourdieu is overtly dismissive of phenomenology in his book The Logic of Practice when he critiques it for being overly descriptive, relying on “taken for granted” assumptions of the world as it exists and failing to account for the “conditions of possibility.”
Drawing from the work of McNay (2000), Huppatz argues that, within critical analyses of gender “…there has been a preoccupation with the symbolic or linguistic construction of corporeal identity and there is a need to refocus on the intertwinement of the material and the symbolic dimensions of the construction of gender identity” (Huppatz, 2006, p. 124).

2.12 Communities of Practice

Communities of practice is a theoretical framework for investigating how identities are learned and reproduced within various groups and locales (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Paechter, 2003; Wenger, 1998). Paechter (2003) applied the communities of practice frame to the learning of masculinities and femininities at local levels. She explicitly accounted for the roles of cultural and institutional discourse amid a focus on the local formation of masculinities and femininities. The framework locates young men’s risk practices as the performance of masculine identities that emerge within a particular community. As such, the communities of practice framework takes into account the meaning made from practices, and the way practitioners relate to each other as well as those considered outsiders.  

The framework communities of practice focuses on the transmission of values and norms at the local level, just as Foucault (1981) conceived of power as operating through the capillaries of the social body. The ability of communities of practice to define gender identity, however, is not unconstrained. Paechter (2003) and Wenger (1998) clarify that one does not simply choose a gendered performance from an array of options. An individual is

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3 While the word communities signify different things in various political and social contexts (Bauman, 2001; St. Denis, 1992; Young, 1990), I am using the term to represent the social grouping which young men voluntarily engage in. While they are often organized by habitus and activity type, this is not often their explicit purpose.
designated and becomes a legitimate member of a *gendered* community of practice by virtue of genitalia. Regardless of whether or not a person desires to be considered masculine or feminine, the power of the culture is such that he or she will be assigned to a group according to sex (Paechter, 2003).

The local community organizes its practice in the context of the wider influences of social institutions such as media, government and religion. The social processes that establish the importance of differentiating sex and gender roles are similarly implicated in affirming hegemonic masculinity. Masculine knowledge, therefore, is privileged over feminine knowledge. While narratives of embodiment and physicality are considered from the nuanced perspective of individuals and communities, they are conceptualized, at least partially, as the discursive productions of dominant social institutions.

Paechter (2003) and Wenger (1998), among others, argue that an individual’s identity is formed by way of participating in social practices within the context of a specific group. A community of practice builds identity in much the same way that Bourdieu (1977) described how the gradual acquisition of habitus is shaped by way of situated learning (Hewitt, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991) in a process similar to apprenticeship (Wenger, 1998). Specifically, one can participate peripherally in a community of practice, gaining expertise in the groups’ activities until they become proficient and move toward a more central role within the community (Wenger, 1998). Learning identity, therefore, takes place in a collective environment (Wenger, 1998), within the constant negotiation of meaning, through decision-making processes around communal terms of engagement. In short, one is *becoming* through the act of doing.
The strength of the communities of practice model is the way in which it accounts for shifts in gender norms in communities and society and, in turn, how it points to possible pathways for intervention. This is the element that most clearly differentiates Connell’s work in configurations of practice from other more theoretical work. Paechter (2003) and Wenger (1998) argue that the plethora of social identities brought in to any one group accounts for fluidity, social change and constant negotiation of meaning within communities of practice. Because one is never a member of a single community of practice one does not learn and develop monolithic feminine or masculine identities. An individual, for example, may be engaged in practicing traditional gender norms in the home community, whereas the workplace practices may involve the enactment of gender norms that do not adhere to stereotypical versions of masculinity or femininity.

This perspective coheres with theoretical models of masculinity theorists, such as Connell (1995; 2005 ), Kimmel (1994) and Clatterbaugh (1990) who state that one person’s enactment of gender must be seen on the larger stage of history and in the context of socializing forces of cultural, social and political institutions. As Connell (2005 ) has articulated, individuals’ differential access to cultural, economic and social capital within these institutions produces multiple expressions of masculinity. While always referencing a hegemonic notion of masculinity, the ways in which the embodiments of masculinity sustain and contest each other within the contexts of various social fields ensure a fluidity of performance (Connell, 2005; Frank, Kehler, Lovell, & Davison, 2003).

In conclusion, a conceptual model that centers on the powerful nature of habitus, field and capital augmented by notions of gender instability and masculine performance is useful for understanding the phenomena of grief, masculinities and risk practices that underpin this
Masculine norms, values and practices are influenced by wider structures and discourses of gender, but they are primarily shaped by local communities of practice. This model accounts for the way that both social activity and the structural processes are implicated in identity formation of young men, as well as the way that they are socialized into and yet participate in the socializing of masculinities.

2.13 Conclusion

I began this chapter with a review of some of the important literature related to young men, masculinities, risk-taking and health. I have noted the gaps in scholarship with regard to theorizing men’s health behaviours in ways that are nuanced and take into account space, place and gender relations. Secondly, I outlined the theoretical framework for this research study that draws from Bourdieu’s theory of practice, Butler’s notion of gender performance and Paetcher’s conceptualization of gender construction and reproduction within the context of communities of practice. I concluded this section with a look at what scholarly literature had to say about gender, age, power and performance—all issues relevant to my theoretical and methodological framework.

In the next chapter I will describe my epistemological stance and take an in-depth look at the methodology and methods employed over the course of this study.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Qualitative research is a situational activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a, p. 5)

In the previous chapter I made the argument that Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, augmented by Butler’s notions of gender performance and by communities of practice model applied to the reproduction of gender, offers a way to unpack the complex influence of grief on masculine risk-taking behaviours. I concluded the chapter by summarizing some of the relevant literature related to the methodological issues I anticipated I would encounter over the course of this research study. In this chapter, I will clarify my methodological stance as it relates to the research design, data collection and analytical components of this study. In the first section, I will outline my epistemological framework, provide a rationale for utilizing multiple methodological strategies, and address their philosophical and epistemological connections to critical social theory. In the second section, I detail the research processes that were employed throughout the project, including the recruitment and project management aspects of the study. I will discuss the use of photo-elicitation as a method that accompanies the narrative interview to explore the complexities related to masculinities, grief and risk-taking activities. I describe the data sources for this project and provide specific information on the coding schema used for categorizing the textual and visual data. In the final section of this chapter, I explore some of the ethical and reflexive issues that emerged through the process of data collection.
3.2 Epistemological Stance

In order to situate myself within this research, the next section is an accounting of my own beliefs and ontological and epistemological assumptions as they have foregrounded the research idea, guided the development of the research questions and informed the research design and data interpretations.

3.2.1 Epistemology

To begin this chapter, I will outline my own epistemology—what I believe about knowledge and the nature of its production. I take a constructivist perspective, which can be defined as a research approach that centralizes an awareness of the way that identities, events and spaces are constituted within various social, discursive and material conditions.

As Kincheloe and McLaren (2002) state, researchers must perpetually “speak/write about the world in terms of something else in the world, in relation to…” (p. 97). In turn, the goal of producing work that is objective or “bias-free” is erroneous. In a challenge to the positivist belief that there is an objective world to be observed and understood, constructivists see the social world as always in the making—constantly being produced and reproduced (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b; Elliot, 2005). There is no one objective “truth” but multiple interpretations that contribute to a thick description of a phenomenon, situated in time and place. And thus, it is a research stance that privileges narrative and subjective accounts of individuals in historical context.

From a constructionist perspective, identity is not stable but produced and reproduced within social interactions, transforming over the course of various discursive and rhetorical contexts and adjusting itself in differential social contexts (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). Social
constructivism is reliant on the idea that individuals are always engaged in a process of positioning (Edley & Wetherell, 1997) wherein stories are constructed in order to explain and justify one’s thoughts. The way that one positions one’s self and others determines how one’s voice will be heard or understood. So if one, for example, desires to have the listener view them as strong and stoic, the story will employ mechanisms that reveal these traits. Conversely, if one is transmitting a story expressing how they were wronged, the story will take a different form. Because positioning is relational, others are brought into the story to act as resources for positioning of self, to contrast or buttress one’s identity (Davies & Harres, 1999; van Lanenhoove & Harre, 1999).

Constructivism contrasts with a post-positive perspective in that it views the narrative interview, not a means to reveal truths or realities about people’s lives, but instead as a mechanism to access the stories people tell about their experiences. It is, at its core, an inquiry into how participants view and interpret their world as they experience it. The speech act of the research participant is seen as mediated by his or her social location, ontological and epistemological assumptions and situation within dominant social discourse. In addition, the interaction between researcher and research participant are similarly informed and shaped by the relationships of their social positions. The knowledge that is produced in the context of the research situation is, at least partially, the outcome of the engagement of the histories, locations and ethics between researcher and participant (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006; Nunkoosing, 2005).

From a constructivist standpoint, the social world is constantly being produced and reproduced through the processes of practice. Research is one of these practices that are complicit in creating and recreating knowledge about the world and its people. As Bourdieu
argues, the implicit danger in research is the reproduction of domination and exclusion, most common when the researcher does not pause to consider the implications of using her voice to speak about others (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a; Reinharz, 1992). A number of critical researchers have documented the way that research has done damage to those with less power by de-authorizing their voices (Alcoff, 1991; hooks, 1989; Kelly, 2000; Lincoln, 2002; Mansfield, 1999; Reinharz, 1992). Rigour, within constructivist, qualitative research, is thus determined, at least in part, by the ability of the researcher to be reflexive—to query her privileged subject position and interrogate the impetus for and potential outcomes of our research engagements.

3.3 Methodology: A Critical Narrative Approach

Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) offer this definition of narrative within the social sciences:

Narratives in the human sciences should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people’s experiences of it. (p. xvi)

While there is a Western bias in the framing of narratives as “clear and sequential,” hearing, documenting and reflecting on an individual’s story provide a powerful pathway into understanding how people see themselves and the world. According to Bourdieu, the underlying beliefs and values that shape an individual’s habitus become apparent only in their social practices and the ways in which they articulate them. The task for the researcher is to analyze the stories and interpretations of an individual’s narrative, understanding that there is a dialectical process of meaning-making between the researcher and participants. For
this study, the focus was on the ways young men narrated stories of losing a male friend and how these narratives exposed their ideas regarding grief, masculinity and health/risk practices.

A narrative approach was fitting for this research study on young men’s grief for the following three reasons. Firstly, a narrative exposes the process of transformation. To evoke comprehensive narratives, the interview was designed to systematically capture the participant’s reflection on a moment in their life, their perspectives on a critical life event before and after, and the meaning it had in their lives. Participants were invited to construct the journey of dealing with the sudden death of a friend, beginning with an introduction of their friend, himself and the nature of their friendship, an explanation of how the friend passed away, how they experienced grief over this loss and what they have taken or who they have come to be since the death. The chronological structure of the narrative enabled me to document the changes that occurred with the passage of time.

Second, a narrative methodology rejects the notion of the stable and immutable self in favour of the idea that identity is shaped in discourse and in interaction (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Thus, a narrative approach highlights the meaning that participants make of their own stories, and draws connections with material, social and institutional conditions. For example, participants’ accounts of their lives in relation to the death of the friend provided insight into how young men perceive their own grief responses in relation to dominant constructions of masculinity.

Third, using interviews to gather narrative data adds the element of “performance of identity,” another view into the way that a participant interacts and sees him or herself in the
world. As Halford, Savage and Witz (1997) clarify, “In-depth interviews do not allow any privileged or unmediated access to people’s thoughts and feelings, but rather produce specific accounts designed to meet the particular situation” (p. 60). This notion of performance was particularly salient in these interviews in which I, a female interviewer, interviewed young men. In this way, it implied that the research interview be seen both as a site for the production of data and as an opportunity to explore the interaction as a particular enmeshment of identities, particularly that of gender, age and social location (Elliot, 2005). Because of my focus on masculinities, the approach also gave direction to explore enactments of manhood through the context of interaction and through storytelling.

In the ongoing construction of identities, meaning is drawn from the experiences the men have lived through. The narratives communicated in the interview are the product of the enmeshment of all that the interviewer and the interviewee bring to this situation. Relative social positioning, cultural discourse and gender relations all play a role in shaping the performances engaged through the research process. The narratives are relayed in a fashion that brings coherence to our dominant narratives of our identity—who we see ourselves to be.

While I was aware that a narrative approach was appropriate for this study, I did not select it without trepidation. Narrative approaches are typically considered to embody stances of trusting and believing (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) whereas, as a critical researcher, I am committed to the idea that stories and talk are never politically innocent. Thus, my narrative approach is augmented by elements of critical discourse analysis (CDA). I am concerned both analyzing stories as they are told and with how those stories fit within systems of dominant discourses. A Foucaudian version of CDA conceives of its function to challenge
the reproduction of dominance and social inequality by the powerful elites (Van Dijk, 1993). Whereas the dominant discourses in contemporary society represent power relations and social formations as natural, Foucault suggests that all knowledge and truth is socially situated and constructed by those in positions of authority (Luke, 1995). Through an exploration of experience, discourse, power and identity in the interpretation of qualitative data, a cultural criticism is produced.

3.4 **Narrative approach Using Interviews and Photo-elicitation**

As Nunkoosing (2005) has argued, the in-depth interview is a way by which researchers go about uncovering the layers of meaning that can be obscured in quantitative data collection. As detailed later in this chapter, this study employed this strategy to collect the stories of participants.

While the interview is the method most often used in the collection of data, it is only one of many and, by no means, always the most appropriate approach. Interviewing men about sensitive issues such as their personal health and health practices presents a variety of challenges. Conducting interviews with the intention of noting patterns and insight, rather than to the ends of providing a “solution” is at odds with traditional masculine scripts (Oliffe, 2010). These challenges are compounded by the difficulty that many people, and especially young males within Western societies, have expressing feelings associated with grief (Noppe & Noppe, 2004). Some emotions, ideas, thoughts and understandings simply cannot be captured within the constraints of language. This necessitates a data collection approach that provides, as St. Pierre (2000) states, “a condition of possibility for producing different knowledge and producing knowledge differently” (p. 21).
Visual methods, such as photo elicitation, allow for the creation of data that goes beyond words. Rather than relying solely on the individual to reflect on the context of the interview, the participant has another medium to express himself, with access to symbolic and visual language. Photo elicitation is a reflective process in which research participants take photographs in preparation for the interview (Allen, 2008; Hurworth, 2003; Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007). Images or visual records of experiences are used as reference points through which research participants can represent aspects of their reality to the researcher (Clark-Ibanez, 2004). The research participant directs the interview, articulating stories and reflections that are triggered by participant-produced photographs (Clark, 1999). A record is kept of the narration and both the photos and the interview are analyzed as data (Allen, 2009; Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007). Although visual ethnographic methods are not equivalent to naturalistic observation, they provide a feasible and useful alternative to collect data that provides additional insights into individuals’ everyday experiences and the meaning they attribute to those experiences (Garcia & Saewyc, 2007).

Photography, as a research tool, has proven to be an effective way of contextualizing voices in the social spaces that individuals occupy (Allen, 2008; Croghan, Griffin, Hunter, & Phoenix, 2008; Mayer, 2001; Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007; Singhal, Harter, Chitnis, & Sharma, 2007). It can facilitate the creation of rapport between the researcher and participant (Clark-Ibanez, 2004), provide structure to the interview (Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007), and function to reduce the strangeness of the interview (Allen, 2008). It allows the research participant to externalize the experiences while, at the same time, engage in a more profound reflection (Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006). Lastly, photo-
elicitation methods provide a memory stimulus (Clark-Ibanez, 2004), triggering thoughts that the participants may have had during the process of photography.

Utilizing visual methods as a way of collecting data has gained popularity with Western culture’s increasing reliance on visual technologies (Rose, 2007). Young people in particular are increasingly immersed in a newly configured reality of varied technology and media use (Thurlow & McKay, 2003). In a recent province-wide study of high school students in British Columbia, for example, 99% of students reported having at least one computer at home; on an average school day, 90% of youth watched television, 88% used the Internet, 75% spent time talking on the phone or text messaging, and 60% played video games (Smith et al., 2009).

Image-based and arts-informed methodologies are particularly effective when doing interview research with participants who are in a “liminal” or transitional space. Grief is an experience of liminality, when one’s sense of life, trust, finality is also disrupted (Herman, 2005). As Herman states “we enter into liminal space and time when what we have known is left behind and we do not yet know what lies ahead” (2005, p. 471). It is during liminal times when words alone are often insufficient to represent an experience and images, with their potential to contain symbolism and multiple meanings, have the potential to portray more effectively. In addition, adolescence and young adulthood are often considered liminal times in which important identity work is done. It was for this reason that a photo-elicitation method was used to facilitate a description of the participants’ initial grief response.

Young men who participated in the photo assignment produced an unexpected number of photos representing how they felt following the death of their friend. I surmised
that this component of the study yielded such rich data, not only because participants had the opportunity to take the time to reflect on the questions outside of the interview context, but also because the act of choosing an image concretized an elusive feeling. The process of photographing grief seemed to provide what Strada and Sourkes (2010) describe as a grief “container” or a symbolic enclosure for difficult emotions. Participants were able to talk about elements of the picture as metaphors for their feelings: a vulnerable process made safe by the fixed nature of the photo and its elements. Interestingly enough, some of the grief photographs actually depicted containing entities: the empty bucket, the hollow man, the cracked concrete.

While the products of visual methods can be particularly powerful for viewers, Moran-Ellis et al. (2006) caution researchers to maintain a position of reflexivity. While interview data may easily lend itself to deconstruction, there may be a temptation to construe pictures as more “truthful” and objective than words (Clark-Ibéñez, 2004). Photos can achieve something that narration through speech and writing cannot because of the amount of information encoded in a single image (Rose, 2007). Moreover, the perspective and construction of an image maintains a kind of “authorless” state, where it is easy to forget that a picture has been framed and constructed by the person taking the photo, as well as by the viewer. Phrases such as “a picture is worth a thousand words” or “pictures don’t lie” provide a foundation for the idea that images represent reality (Clark-Ibáñez, 2007). However, the same constructivist and critical interpretation of the one-to-one interview apply in the analysis of the photo. While the picture itself remains unchanged, the interpretation of the projected imagery is constantly evolving, its meaning shifting with time.
3.5 Research Methods

The data-gathering component of this project took place between May and November 2010. Institutional ethics approval from the University of British Columbia was granted in May 2010.

3.5.1 Participants

A total of 25 male participants between the ages of 19 and 25 years were recruited for this study. Inclusion criteria included young men who spoke English, lived in the Lower Mainland, British Columbia and who had lost a friend through accidental death sometime in the past three years. The shared criterion of all participants was that the friend’s death must have been due to a “risky” activity (considered risky by the researcher—not necessarily the participant) such as drug overdose, motor vehicle accident, sports injury or homicide. Known suicides were not included in the criteria as the issues surrounding them were different.

Recruitment was purposive, designed to create a population of participants who were representative of a range of “fields” and communities. This was done in order to deepen understanding about the different experiences of those from a variety of social locations, including those of different ethnicities and cultural background, socio-economic statuses and practice communities.

A target of 25 participants was set to allow for breadth and depth of data. This pool of 25, while higher than many qualitative studies, would facilitate data saturation and provide a thick description of the phenomenon, overcoming some of the limitations imposed by context. The number was also set at this level to allow for participant drop-out before a full set of data was collected. It was anticipated that, because of the sensitive nature of the topic
and the realities of the age group being studied, this was a possibility that must be accounted for in the research design (Lincoln, 2002).

3.5.2 Recruitment

Several methods of recruitment were used to reach across different social and cultural groups of young men. To assist with a recruitment strategy, a young man was hired to provide contact to other young men in his age cohort, as well as to provide input and feedback into the recruitment materials. This young person had experienced the death of two friends by way of a car accident and accidental drug overdose. He identified as a skateboarder and snowboarder and these attributes thereby gained him entry into these relatively closed communities. In order to prepare him to explain the research, I took him through the interview process. I explained to him the details of the interview structures and the process of the photo assignment. He was able to give feedback regarding the approach we should take with young men as well as the wording of questions.

Posters, business cards and flyers (see Appendix A) were distributed in a variety of areas across Vancouver including gyms, community centres, sports stores, universities and colleges, trade schools, Aboriginal centres. A Facebook page was created and many individuals were invited to “like”. We met with community youth workers to explain the process and give out flyers. Youth workers posted information and sent out information to e-mail list servers. The research study was posted in the employment section on “Craigslist”, a well-known website resource many access to look for events and employment opportunities.

Potential participants were directed to a website created for this study (http://www.guysresearch.ca) to find more information about the purpose of this study and
how to get involved. The website provided information about participant criteria, the time commitment asked of participants, components of the study (interviews and photo project), local support services and resources for those bereaved, biography of the research staff and study contact information. The website was designed using Word Press with the help of the young man hired to act as a project advisor.

The recruitment materials instructed potential participants to contact the researcher by way of text, e-mail or dedicated study phone. When young men first contacted me using any of these methods, I ensured that the participant met study criteria with regards to age and accidental death of a friend in the appropriate timeframe. If the participant met the criteria, I collected contact information and arranged for a first meeting with the participant.

Table 3.1

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>19–21</th>
<th>21–23</th>
<th>24–25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest education achieved</th>
<th>Some High school</th>
<th>High school Grad</th>
<th>Post Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current primary activity</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>School/Work</th>
<th>Neither</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Relationship status | Single | Dating | Lives with partner |
|                    | 13     | 9      | 4                  |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethno-racial background</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Non-White/Non-Aboriginal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In total, 25 participants participated in the first interview and 20 participated in the photo project and second narrative interview. Despite repeated attempts to contact five of the
participants, I was unable to get a response. Because of the richness present in the first interviews, I included these transcripts in my data sources.

### 3.5.3 Data Collection

#### 3.5.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

It was important that the participant feel at ease on a first meeting so I met them in their neighbourhood in a location of their choosing—a quiet coffee shop, a local library or at their home. Interviews varied widely in length, lasting from 20 minutes to one hour, but typically were about 40 minutes long.

I began by thanking the participant for agreeing to be part of the project, underscoring the fact that it may have been a difficult decision to volunteer for a study of this nature. I explained the components of the project including the agenda of the first interview and the “next steps” of photo assignment and the second interview. At this point I asked the participant if he had any questions. Typically, they did not. I guided the participant through the process of consent and explained the form to them (Appendix B). I highlighted the voluntary nature of the study and their right to confidentiality. I made clear that some photos would be integrated into papers and eventually be chosen for a photo display but that their names would not be attached to the photos. Participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions or express concerns prior to signing the consent form.

During this first meeting, demographic information was verbally collected (and digitally recorded) that included information about age, educational level, employment status and ethnicity. Information was not collected regarding sexual orientation because of concerns that participants would question its applicability to the project. The interviews were semi-
structured and began with general questions about what activities the participant was currently engaged with—how days were spent and their general life circumstances (Appendix C). This line of questioning was followed both for the purpose of building rapport as well to get a sense of the social spaces (fields) that they occupied and the thoughts and feelings they had about them. For example, while some participants were at peace with the fact that they had not graduated from high school and were unemployed, others indicated regret and embarrassment over this issue.

I then asked questions about the participant’s relationship to their friend and the cause of their friend’s death. Participants were given the opportunity to say as much or little as they wanted about the death (given the opportunity for a second interview) depending on their comfort level and desire to talk. When the initial interview was complete I explained the process of the photo assignment. The participant was given instructions on how to use the camera (though all of them were aware of how to work a digital camera). The participants were given the opportunity to read over the photo assignment and ask questions.

Subsequent interviews were scheduled for two weeks later. I invited participants to be in contact with me should they have issues with the camera or questions about the assignment.

3.5.3.2 The Photo Assignment

All efforts were made to keep the photo assignment as simple and engaging as possible. Unlike most photo-elicitation studies, the instructions given in this study to

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4 Follow-up interviews were easily the most challenging part of the project. There were multiple incidents of no-shows or having to call, text and e-mail to schedule a follow up. This seemed to be remedied by prescheduling the next meeting one week following the first interview. While at the outset this may appear a very short time to complete the assignment, there was less time to forget the assignment or lose the camera.
participants were more specific. Participants were given a list of questions (Appendix D) and were told to treat it like a questionnaire that they would answer with pictures instead of words. They were told that there was no “right” answer and that they could be as symbolic or as concrete as they wished. Participants were also reassured that the quality of the photo was not the important aspect of the project and to not concern themselves about whether or not their photos would be “good enough.”

The questions on the photo questionnaire were theoretically driven and were designed to explicitly explore four different domains: shared practices, settings and context, grief processes and practices, and masculinities. These domains were generated by Bourdieu’s theory of practice (habitus, field, capital), the communities of practice framework and masculinities theory.

To avoid complications of managing release forms and introducing more obligation for the participant, the young men were instructed to avoid taking pictures where people could be recognized. If they chose, they could take pictures of themselves, but reminded that these photos would be used in the research and might be shared in a larger context.

Instead of engaging in the photo assignment, one participant requested to use some of the photos that he had taken on the trip to Asia where his friend had died. Because many of the questions were “place” oriented, he felt as though these photos would be a better accounting of shared practices. Because the photos were intended to act as an elixir for conversation rather than semiotic analysis, I agreed to let him do this.
3.5.3.3 Follow-up Semi-structured Interviews

The second narrative interview was driven by the photos that the young men took in the period of time between interviews (Appendix E). I began by asking the participant about how they experienced the process of picture-taking, allowing the participant to debrief his experience of the data collection as well as document his feedback on the method. Following this discussion, I loaded the pictures on to my laptop and asked him to tell me about the pictures he took. If the participant did not spontaneously bring up the topics outlined in the photo assignment, I initiated a conversation about where the photo was taken, why he chose that particular photo and the meaning he made of the photo now as he viewed it.

When all the photos had been referenced, I moved to a conversation about topics that had either not been addressed while looking at the pictures, or to more fully explores issues that had been raised by the photographs. I asked participants to comment on anything that had come up for them in the interview or questions that they might have for me as the researcher.

At the conclusion of the interview I thanked the participant; again, offered resources should they need to talk further about the death of their friend. I let them know that I would be in touch with them following a display of the photos.

3.5.4 Field Notes

Throughout the process of data collection I kept a record of my impressions of the research. My first attempts at field notes were word documents set in a notes format in which I would write my general impressions. While achieving factual accuracy with these notes I did not find writing them in this format very useful. At the suggestion of a colleague, I began
to write the field notes in e-mails to the study address. I gave them a conversational tone, as if writing an e-mail to a co-researcher about my impression of the interview. In this way I described visuals, what I thought about the “tone” of the interview, my level of comfort, my perception of how the participant felt about being there, which questions got at the topics I wanted to explore and ones that just did not seem to work. I also reflected on the content of the interview—where I thought it was leading me and what new themes I was noticing.

3.5.5 Participant Remuneration

Participants who participated in both interviews and the photo assignment received $40. At the beginning of the project I gave participants $20 following each of the two interviews. After losing three cameras and participants I revised the honorarium procedure so that participants were given $40 after doing the second interview and returning the camera. Participants were told upfront that they would be given their honoraria following the second interview.

3.6 Data Analyses
3.6.1 Data Organization

Data sources for this project included interview data, photos and field notes (see Appendix F). To ensure proper tracking of stages of interview process and maintenance of confidentiality of participants, a considerable amount of time was spent developing systems that would facilitate the logical organization and easy retrieval of the sources. At the end of the project I compiled all of the field notes into a master document and, in a “low tech” turn of events, analyzed them with highlighters and by making notes in the margins. I created a new document in which I organized the content of my field notes.
Both first and second interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed. Transcriptions were checked against the digital recordings for accuracy. Unclear or inaccurate transcription was corrected in the document. As they were returned, transcriptions were saved into rich text format and imported into the ATLAS.ti6™ computer program.

Photos were initially loaded into the digital folder designated for each participant (which also contained digital recordings of the interviews and interview transcripts). Photos were then imported into Atlas.ti6™ each as a primary document. General notes about the context and basic content of the interviews were attached to each primary document as free memos. Photos were electronically linked (within Atlas.ti6™) to participant interview transcripts. Descriptors of photos present in the interview transcripts were noted and attached as memos to the photos.

### 3.6.2 Interview Analysis

The process of analysis began as soon as I received the first transcripts back. The first five transcripts were printed off in hard copy in a format that enabled me to make notes in the margins about my impressions of the interview structure and initial ideas regarding potential codes. Adjustments to the interview structure were made on the basis of these reflections. These changes were largely linguistic rather than conceptual—changing “buddy” to “friend” and using the term “adventure sports” rather than “extreme sports” but they were important in that the questions would be more representative of participant language.

Following the preliminary analysis of the first five interviews, I began developing a formal coding structure using Atlas.ti6™. The categories for analysis were developed out of
the research questions, literature review, field notes and an iterative coding process (Boyatzis, 1998). I utilized a constant comparison method—an inductive category coding based on “units of meaning” of textual data, refinement of categories, exploration of relationship and patterns across categories leading up to an integration of data or sense-making (Bong, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 1990).5 See Appendix G for a coding structure.

It soon became apparent that two types of analyses, within and across narratives, were appropriate for this data. Early data analysis revealed six thematic categories: shared practices, shared identity, settings and contexts, grief processes and masculinities. As per the interview design, each thematic category was present within most of the stories. Codes that adhered to these themes were gathered together in “families” so the data could be categorically rendered.

The other analytic strategy was that of examining each narrative, in its entirety, to discern an overarching narrative theme. For each of the 25 narratives, I wrote a summary paragraph detailing participant’s story. In these paragraphs, I integrated my field notes and observations regarding social locations of ethnicity and socio-economic status.

I chose pseudonyms for each of the participants to maintain their anonymity. In most cases these pseudonyms were chosen randomly from commonly used Caucasian names within this age cohort. When participants strongly identified with a particular cultural group,

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5 One of the significant methodological issues with computer assisted analysis is assuming coding and analysis can be conflated and that, somehow, careful coding will equip one to uncover a truth. Bong (2002) argues that there are two primary research pitfalls in coding data. The first is making the assumption that a code occurring multiple times points to greater significance than does the single occurrence of a code. Here, the researcher risks creating artificial themes and missing important outlying data. The second danger is creating too many micro codes by segmenting the data too specifically. In effect researcher loses sight of the totally of the narrative- ‘seeing the trees and forgetting the forest’. Bong suggests that a remedy for both these potential pitfalls is a return to the stance of reflexivity- what are the goals of this research? What am I learning from the research participants? What is the differential impact of the stories?
however, I used names that reflected this. In the cases where participants referred to their friend, I used the first initial.

3.6.3 Photographs

Researchers taking up photo elicitation as a research method make a variety of decisions regarding the type of analysis that the photographs will undergo. There is what can be thought of as a continuum of analytic approaches that range from those drawn from traditional photo voice (which does not mandate analysis of the photo beyond the comments of the photographer) to an elaborate photo investigation that takes up formal tools of media analysis.

My approach was primarily drawn from the theoretical framework of photo voice (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, Yi, & Tao, 1998) in that photos were designed to drive conversation and act as a speaking tool. It departs significantly from a photo voice approach in that its purpose was not intended to serve as a tool of participatory action research.

In addition, my approach to photo elicitation was taken partially from the methods described by Oliffe, Bottorff, Kelly and Halpin (2008) in a study examining the smoking practices of young fathers. The goal of the first step of this photo analysis was to understand the motivation that the participant had for taking the photo and his own interpretation of it (Oliffe. et al., 2008). In the second stage of photo analysis, my goal was to augment the participant’s interpretations with my own perspectives and interpretations. I loaded all of the pictures into iPhoto® where I was able to see the group of photos taken by each participant. I made notes about my own thoughts about the photos—unexpected responses to the photo
questionnaire, themes I noticed, hegemonic and counter hegemonic interpretations of grief and masculinity, and so forth.

In the next stage of analysis I sought to examine the photos from the perspectives of my theoretical framework. I printed off the photos so that I had a hard copy of each picture. Using a significant amount of wall space, I regrouped the photos into the domains from which the photo assignment was created: shared practices, settings and context, grief processes and practices and masculinities. I made thematic notes on each category; for example, photos of settings and contexts or “field” were predominantly places that were unsupervised by older adults. I reflected on what the photos said to me about the theoretical areas from which the domains were derived. I again examined the linkages between masculinity and grief, settings and practices, risk and masculinities. Finally, using the network manager in Atlas.ti6™, I created graphical representations of some of the relationships between categories that I saw emerging.

3.6.4 Integrating Interview and Photo Analyses

Moran-Ellis (2006) argues that data generated by different means must be evaluated or analyzed by way of its independent epistemology. The point where data (interviews, field notes and photos) are brought together to form a theoretical account is when researcher can claim data integration. After conducting separate analyses of the photos and interviews, I systematically brought together the initial findings to analyze the combined data. In Figure 2 below is a table that summarizes the coding from both analyses within the domains of the larger theoretical framework.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Shared Practices**—This category captured the practices that the participant and his friend engaged in together and defined a community of practice. | **Interview**  
What did you and your friend do together? | **Common practices**  
Communities of practices  
Drinking and Driving  
Interests and Hobbies  
*What we did together*  
Fighting  
Sports  
“We were different than the other kids”  
*Life Goals*  
Partying  
Personality  
*Reckless Activity*  
Substance Use |
| **Photo Assignment**         | **What did you and your friend do together?**                                    | **Hanging out**  
“Goofing off”  
Travel  
Team Sports  
Individual sports  
Art  
Religion  
School  
Drugs  
Alcohol  
Poker  
Eating |
| **Shared Identity**—This domain was related to aspects of identity that was common between the friends and ways that it was divergent. | **Interview:**  
Describe your friend to me  
What did you and your friend do together?  
What did you have in common with your friend?  
What were the differences between you and your friend? | **Aboriginal**  
Being Different  
Description of Friend  
Education  
SES  
Reputation  
Interests  
“We Under siege” |
| **Photo assignment**         | Coded in shared practices                                                        |                                                                      |
| **Settings and Context**—This category spoke of the places and spaces most commonly occupied by the participant and his friend. In some senses, this category overlapped with the preceding domain. | **Interview**  
What places did you and your friend most often find yourself | **Street**  
By water  
Party (private home)  
Party (public venue)  
Mountain (ski hill)  
Mountain (mountain climbing)  
Private home  
Backyard  
Park (day time)  
Park (night time)  
Restaurant  
Bar  
Skate park  
School (in class)  
School (smoke pit) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Photo Assignment | Where did you and your friend hang out? | Street  
By water  
Party (private home)  
Party (public venue)  
Mountain (ski hill)  
Mountain (mountain climbing)  
Private home  
Backyard  
Park (day time)  
Park (night time)  
Restaurant  
Bar  
Skate park  
School (in class)  
School (smoke pit) |
| Grief Processes and Practices | **Interview:**  
If you were to talk with someone who has just lost a friend who is, right now, the same age as you were at the time of your friend’s death, what would you say to them? | Change–personal  
Change–community  
Counselling  
Dealing with grief  
Fighting  
Funeral  
Finding out  
Getting help  
Getting sober  
How friend died  
Judgment–personal  
Judgment–media  
Life is fragile |
| Photo Assignment | **Photo assignment:**  
After your friend died what did you do and where did you go?  
Who, if anyone, did you talk to about the death?  
What places remind you of your friend?  
What do you do to honour your friend?  
Take a picture of something that represents how you felt after your friend died. | Where I went after he died  
How I felt  
Dealing with grief  
What reminds me of him  
Honouring his memory  
Memorial artefacts  
Memorial events  
Mental health–previous to death  
Mental health–post accident  
Spirit lives on  
Substance use–post accident  
I take him with me  
Thinking of death now  
Victim’s Services |
| Masculinities | This domain encompassed individual, social and communal perspectives on masculinities. It also included verbal and photographic responses to masculinities and grief. | **Interview:**  
How have your ideas of masculinity changed in the past years?  
What do you think society has to say about being a man?  
What do you think? | Masculinity–mindset  
Masculinity–physicality  
Masculinity–contesting stereotypes  
Masculinity–conforming to stereotypes  
“Man up” |
### Table 3.2. Coding From Both Analyses Within the Domains of the Larger Theoretical Framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photo assignment:</td>
<td>What symbolizes being a man to you? What do you think symbolizes being a man to your friends? What does it mean to “man up”?</td>
<td>Strength Control Sticking to the path Freedom Traveler Rebel Loyalty Responsibility Tough Guy Visibility Invisibility Shift/Evolve</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After reviewing the larger themes, I reviewed the 25 narratives and grouped them thematically according to:

Narrating the self: a narrative of identity or the way that the participant constructed himself within the context of the narrative.


This process is theorized and explained below.

### 3.7 Narrating the Self

Narrative identities should not be understood as free fictions. Rather, they will be the product of an interaction between the cultural discourses which frame and provide structure for the narrative and the material circumstances and experiences of each individual. (Elliot, 2005, p. 127)

The notion of doing masculinities comes out of the post-positivist notion that sex and gender are not predetermined and fixed but as a discursive production determined by context and historical situation. According to queer theorists such as Judith Butler (1990), gender is put on oneself as it is scripted and performed. Individuals constitute their gender identity through action (Connell, 1995). Likewise, ethnicity, race, ability, class and age intersect to
create multiple expressions of masculinities (Connell, 1995; Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001). Elliot (2005) also proposes that all narratives are relayed from the context in which one is situated. The way that one narrates their own identity is, in part, constituted by the paradigm understandings, institutional or communal location from which the narrative arises.

As detailed in Chapter 4, I began to see patterns in the way that individuals performed or narrated their own identities in relation to the death of their friend and their response to this death. Using the theoretical frameworks guiding this study—masculinity, theory of practice and communities of practice—I was able to note the ways in which the interview and photo discourse was scaffolded by habitus, social discourse and hegemonic masculinities.

In order to define the narrations of self I went back to the computer coding that I had done and engaged in a process of closer analysis. I retrieved the data that I had broadly coded under the following headings

- Education
- Employment
- Ethnicity
- Immediate Response to Death
- Masculinity | grief
- Masculinity | mindset
- Masculinity | physical
- Masculinity | contesting stereotypes
- Risk Practices | substance use
- Risk Practices | violence
- Risk Practices | adventure sports
- Risk Practices | drinking and driving
- Social Space | privilege
- Social Space | sportsscape
- Social Space | urban
- Social Space | poverty
- Social Space | rural
In total, there were 661 segments of data that were coded under these categories. I brought in photos related to the categories, I printed off the data segments in hard copy and made notes about the themes I saw emerging. Once I had established what I thought were themes across the participants, I recoded the data segments as Adventurer, Lamplighter, Emotional Man and Father Figure. I developed a table (see Table 3.3) outlining the characteristics I saw to be present within each theme. I reassembled the data segments under the narrative from which they originally emerged to see if there was a fit between the categories and individual narratives. I integrated demographic data by noting this with the participant’s name at the top of the collected data segments. I brought in photos related to all of the questions, as many seemed to have a relationship to the narration of self. I grouped collections of photos under each thematic category with my own notes about the pictures (Figure 3.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adventurer</th>
<th>Lamplighter</th>
<th>Emotional Man</th>
<th>Father Figure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Privileged habitus</td>
<td>Working-class habitus</td>
<td>Overt affective expressions of grief</td>
<td>Middle-class habitus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disconnection from emotion</td>
<td>Former substance user</td>
<td>Response to reflective or cognitive questions is a statement of feeling.</td>
<td>Clear ‘life plan’ and goals for self in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in sports/risk-activity</td>
<td>Transformation of identity following death</td>
<td>Critique of traditional masculine constructs of grief.</td>
<td>Articulation of his role in the life of others (ways in which he supported others touched by friend’s death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affinity with others that engage in adventure sports</td>
<td>Commitment to some form of social action.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cohesive statement about the meaning of the death in own life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Death described as learning opportunity rather than transformational.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3. Thematic Category Definitions-Self.
3.7.1 No Comment

Throughout the process of interviewing I was consistently surprised at the willingness of participants to share their story and reflect on its meaning. The richness of the data enabled a thematic analysis, as demonstrated above. Previous work on the topic of interviewing men had led me to believe that this would be a far more challenging part of the project than it turned out to be (Oliffe & Mroz, 2005). There were, however, participants who were less willing to say much in the interview setting. My questions were met with one-word answers and, compared to participants who took an array of photographs, these participants produced pictures that were only loosely related to the photo questionnaire. While a multitude of factors could have influenced their reasons for not answering questions in more detail such as the painful subject matter, inexperience with the interview process and/or mistrust of me as a researcher. I refer to these interviews, not because I do not believe that these participants did not contribute valuable aspects to the study but because I wanted to clarify that not every interview was analyzed in the framework described above.
3.8 Narrating the Death Story

Elliot (2005) helpfully provides a concept of genre as a way of understanding the ways that narratives can be understood. Narratives include touchstones that are culturally shared—roles of heroes and villains for example, or a story thematic such as melodrama, comedy, tragedy, parable—that anchor and structure the story. The genre also takes into account the feeling that is intended to be evoked in the audience, in this case the researcher. A comedy, for instance, uses devices to make the audience laugh, to showcase the humour within any given situation. A parable, on the other hand, extracts the meaning or the “lesson” out of a story, stressing ways by which one might live in a different way. While often overlapping and never mutually exclusive, the narrative analytic tool of genre is a method that merges form and content.

As with developing thematic categories for the narrations of self, I began to see the ways that themes within the interview data cohere to represent a genre. I saw patterns in the ways that stories were told and the conditions that contextualized the stories. In a process mirroring the one designed to define narrations of self, I retrieved data that I thought to be related to the death narrative. I used data under the codes for

- Change|community
- Change|personal
- Change|practices
- Community of Practice|Divergent Practices
- Community of Practice|Common Practices
- Description of Death
- Description of Friend
- Description of Self
- Description of Grief
- Honouring Friend|Artefacts
- Honouring Friend|Lifestyle
- Honouring Friend|Memorial events
- Immediate Response to Death
In total, there were 734 data segments.

With the data segments in front of me I developed broad themes as to how narratives were told, how they were situated and what I concluded to be the message behind each of the narratives. For instance, some of the stories seemed to be told in parable form with a specific *moral*. I developed a graph that linked the type of death with the narrative. For example, a significant number of the stories of death by drug overdose were situated as an “inevitable death” story wherein the young man who has passed away is a victim of multiple social ills. The unexpected death encompasses the death stories of young men who were “going somewhere.” As with the narrative of self, I created a table and graphic (see Table 3.4 and Figure 3.2) that detailed each death narrative and its characteristics.
Inevitable Death
Narrator and friend are working-class habitus
Death occurred as a result of drug overdose or homicide
Narrator speaks of challenges (addiction, poverty, violence) in his own and friend’s life
Narrator has experienced multiple deaths of friends as a result of risky activities
The notion of ‘voluntary’ risk taking is contested

Unexpected Death
Narrator and friend are from middle/upper class habitus.
Deceased friend is portrayed as having a bright and hopeful future.
Cause of death is not related to a pattern of risk behaviours but is a ‘wrong place, wrong time’ or a mis-step.

Honourable Death
Narrator and friend are from middle/upper class habitus.
Friend died as a result of an adventure sports injury.
The death was mourned for the loss of potential, and yet, the friend is portrayed as a hero for dying doing what he loved.
Construction of masculine identity is associated with risk taking within sportsapes

Ridiculous Death
Friend shared a social space with the adventure.
Friend described as proficient in his area of expertise (sports or drug taking)
Friend is considered to have died as a result of own miscalculation or misjudgement (when this should not have been the case)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inevitable Death</th>
<th>Unexpected Death</th>
<th>Honourable Death</th>
<th>Ridiculous Death</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrator and friend are working-class habitus</td>
<td>Narrator and friend are from middle/upper class habitus.</td>
<td>Narrator and friend are from middle/upper class habitus.</td>
<td>Friend shared a social space with the adventure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death occurred as a result of drug overdose or homicide</td>
<td>Deceased friend is portrayed as having a bright and hopeful future.</td>
<td>Friend died as a result of an adventure sports injury.</td>
<td>Friend described as proficient in his area of expertise (sports or drug taking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrator speaks of challenges (addiction, poverty, violence) in his own and friend’s life</td>
<td>Cause of death is not related to a pattern of risk behaviours but is a ‘wrong place, wrong time’ or a mis-step.</td>
<td>The death was mourned for the loss of potential, and yet, the friend is portrayed as a hero for dying doing what he loved.</td>
<td>Friend is considered to have died as a result of own miscalculation or misjudgement (when this should not have been the case)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrator has experienced multiple deaths of friends as a result of risky activities</td>
<td></td>
<td>Construction of masculine identity is associated with risk taking within sportsapes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The notion of ‘voluntary’ risk taking is contested</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4. Thematic Category Definitions–Death.

Narrating the Death

Figure 3.2. Narrating the Death Story.

The findings outlined in chapters 5, 6 and 7 discuss, in greater depth, how individual and death narratives are revealing of the relationships between gendered identity, community of practice, social space and capital. In Appendix H, I have provided an outline of how
participants were located according to their narratives. Appendix I gives a fuller introduction to individual participants as well as a demographic overview.

3.9 Some Ethical Considerations

Prior to engaging in this research study and, indeed, throughout the process of research, a number of ethical issues were raised. The first matter was a concern for the participant involved in the project. Young men who volunteered for the interview would be asked to reflect on a sensitive topic, perhaps probed to think about what they had not previously considered. With this knowledge, how would I mitigate the potential to re-traumatize participants? Secondly, the social locations we bring to the research conversation play a powerful role in shaping the exchange. While all research is characterized by an element of performance, researching across lines of both gender and age potentially accentuates this (Arendell, 1997). It was important to think about, what Elliot (2005) and others have referred to as the “enmeshment of identities” when developing a researcher identity. Finally, central to a constructivist epistemology is the notion that discerning “truth” is an elusive goal in research. When stories of the same event do not match up or are in clear contradiction, what role is there for the research in confronting these inconsistencies with participants and when do they simply become fodder for a narrative analysis? In the following section I will address these ethical issues in greater detail and describe the strategies I used to ensure the well-being of the participant and the rigor of the research.

3.9.1 Re-traumatization

The interview questions and photo assignment were designed to explore the cognitive and emotional experience of losing a friend to a sudden death. They were asked to remember the nature of relationship they had with this friend, activities they engaged in and interests
they shared. Participants recounted the memories they had about the death of their friend, how they experienced grief and what they did to memorialize the death.

These are potentially difficult subjects for individuals of any age, but particularly complicated for young men. Given the age and stage of participants, I predicted that there would a greater than average chance that they would not have ready-made support systems (as may be present for younger participants in family of origin, or the school system, or at hand for older participants with life partners). In addition, dominant constructions of masculinity do not provide for the expression of and getting support for grief issues. I (rightly) predicted that this would be the first time that some participants had talked about this experience in an in-depth fashion. While the process of talking about their experience of losing a friend might prove to be therapeutic for some, if not all of the research participants, the project was designed as research and not counselling. There would be no long-term relationship established between the researcher and the participant.

While this ethical issue could never be fully resolved, steps were taken to mitigate any potential harm to participants. I tried to create a warm, supportive and enclosed environment for participants to tell their stories. At the outset, I made my role clear to the participant by describing the goals of the project in research terms, for example “to learn about how young men work through their experience of loss so that we can provide better support services in the future.” I was intentional about assessing the levels of support in their lives to ensure that they would have someone familiar to go to if they needed to process their experience further. Whether or not they had a strong support system, I provided a list of local resources for those dealing with grief.
In order to assess the emotional status of participants at the conclusion of the research, my final question was regarding the experience of the interview process and the photo-taking. All of participants stated that they found it useful. For the majority, it was the first time that they had talked to someone about what it felt like to lose a friend. While some of the emotions they experienced over the course of the study were difficult, no participant reported feeling traumatized by the research.

3.9.2 Identity Crafting

As Kirsch (1993) clarifies “even when researchers follow feminist principles of research and engage in interactive, non-hierarchical and open-ended interviews, the interview process itself remains a performance, with both the interviewer and the interviewed playing culturally-determined roles” (p. 31). Drawing from the literature on research performance cited above and my own experiences in the field, I attempted to craft a researcher identity that took into account ethics and efficacy.

When researching youth cultures some investigators make efforts to blend in or to become one of the crowd by performing a youthful identity. If the researcher is close in age or has a youthful appearance, this may be an effective strategy (Pascoe, 2007). More times than not, however, young people see appropriation of space and voice as a violation (McKeganay & Bloor, 1991). Attempting to appear as part of the population places the researcher under suspicion of being a spy.

As a younger person doing research with adolescent and young adult men I was aware that I might be seen as someone to be hit on. Now a mother well into my thirties I can comfortably assume that this was not a factor in the interview setting. In many previous
interviews that I had done with young people, I had intentionally created an informal environment. I dressed casually and in keeping with a youthful appearance. Without fully joining them or attempting to pass myself off as a teenager, I tried not to come off as an adult who could not understand or relate to issues of peer pressure, school problems or sexuality.

In preparation for interviews about loss and grief my job as a researcher was to create an atmosphere that would primarily foster trust and emotional safety. This implied that I come across as a professional adult who could be relied upon to maintain a predictable and enclosed environment. I was careful to dress for interviews in a way that was more formal than I might otherwise. I arrived early to interview meetings to set up a professional environment.

When thinking about the notion of masculinity and the gendered performance of the researcher I reflected that the conditions of the recruitment strategy and the nature of the phenomenon under investigation would assuage hyper-masculine behaviour. The majority of the young men would contact me because they wanted to process their experience or because they wanted to provide a memorial for their friend. Unlike the circumstances of some ethnographic studies, in which the researchers enters—sometimes uninvited—into the field, to a certain extent these participants were inviting me into their lives. What I most often experienced in the interview setting was young men coming to me to bare their soul.

Deutch (2004) provides a helpful example of this in her discussion about her apprehension in interviewing young males within her ethnography of an inner-city youth club. While she felt that she was connected by gender to her female research participants she was separated by race, class, gender and age from the boys. She was surprised by the positive
relationships that ensued stating that “I am convinced that this was at least partially due to my willingness to acknowledge the power issues inherent in our relationships and to respect [the] agency [of male research participants]” (p. 896).

In order to demonstrate respect for the participant’s willingness to tell his story, and to dispel the idea that this project was solely an academic exercise for me, I made the decision to tell participants a little bit about my motivation for choosing this research topic. With the understanding that our stories were not matched and that we were not coming to the research interview as equals I let them know that I had lost two members of my family to accidental death.

3.9.3 Discerning Truth

As stated in previous sections, constructivist epistemology and narrative approaches are underpinned by the notion that research can never produce a truth claim as much of that which we know to be true is partial and situated. The interview context, as any context of human engagement, is an enmeshment of habitus, social location, and personal investments. This was well illustrated when I came up against stories of the same event that did not appear to match. Sometimes the differences in the versions were relatively minor—such as in the case of individuals speaking of the death of the same friend. In another cases the participants’ and the media’s accounting of the context wherein the death took place were very different. The participant’s story told of the police coming in and shooting his friend while he slept, while the media report told of police coming in to break up a domestic disturbance.

In comparing the two stories I am neither implying that the participant is intentionally misconstruing the circumstances nor accepting that newspapers are always accurate and
unbiased. This example does illustrate the mediation of social location, histories and positions. Given that I am a White, educated, middle-class woman, the participant could reasonably assume that I would have no negative experiences with the police, such as that of being falsely accused of a crime. He would also be aware of cultural stigma against working-class young men, a stereotype intensified by the fact that he was out partying, leaving a young child at home (irresponsible). In order to construct a positive social narrative for the researcher he would need to portray his friend as an innocent bystander.

The construction of narratives that can be considered objectively problematic does not inherently threaten the validity of qualitative data as might be claimed from a positivist perspective (Nunkoosing, 2005). Indeed, based on much theoretical evidence regarding the dynamics of interviews, the assumption can be made the interviewees will attempt to tell interviewers what they think they want to hear (Maccoby & Maccoby, 1954).

Nunkoosing (2005) speaks of these moments of inquiry wherein the researcher must use creativity and sensitivity to facilitate the telling of different stories, stories that go beyond well-rehearsed scripts that the participant uses to shape the narrative. He uses Wood, Brunner and Ross’s (1976) notion of scaffolding to explain the use of innovative questioning and ways of interpreting things for the participant. I attempted to deal with this barrier by giving assurances to the participant that I was cognizant of the stigma they might experience and that this research project was not designed to collude with dominant cultural narratives regarding irresponsible and selfish young men. All but the most privileged of the participants acknowledged that this stereotype existed and that they felt compelled to defend themselves against it. This assurance was also useful in future discussions about masculinity and hegemonic norms.
3.10 Limitations

This research study both benefited from and was limited by the extent that it was guided by a theoretical framework. The danger of using theory is that findings might be interpreted too narrowly and data that do not “fit” the theoretical framework are given less credence. To remedy this I attempted to be persistently reflective and regularly return to participants’ interviews, my field notes and the photos participants had taken. Whenever a theoretical analysis was achieved I went back and audited myself, ensuring that I had not inadvertently adapted meanings in order to fit into my thematic categories. When contradictory findings did exist, I revisited the themes and adapted them accordingly.

This study faced a limitation common to most qualitative research projects using interview data. The reality is that there are some participants who are more able than others to reflect on their experiences and articulate them to their own satisfaction, at least in the context of an interview with a female doctoral researcher. It was challenging for me not to give more weight to the voices of those who were more able and willing to talk when distilling findings and making interpretations. This challenge was partially mediated by conducting two interviews with participants and including a photo assignment that was less reliant on the participant to produce cohesive statements. This remains, however, an ongoing issue for researchers who desire to collect as large a range of experiences as is possible.

With respect to interviewing individuals about issues of health and risk, there is the potential for response bias as, in order to be “good participants,” participants attempted to tell me what I wanted to hear. This is particularly true in the case where there are strong discursive messages about study elements such as health, safety and masculinity. Given the
interview situation, in which there is a power differential, the participants may have felt as though they needed to craft an answer they perceived to be correct or socially acceptable.

While the number of participants in this qualitative study met the standards for the collection of rich data, there will always be the many people, with unique stories, who are not reached. Despite my best efforts to design strategies to ask those who never participate in research to participate in this research, studies such as this one can only base findings on the willing—those who are willing to offer up their vulnerability to be under study. This, of course, limits how the findings can be applied to groups of young men with vastly different experiences. This study is an account of the reflections of these particular participants in this particular time.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of my methodological approach and a conceptual framework that underpinned the research strategy and method. This study employed qualitative interviewing and photo elicitation to gather data. In this way, participants’ words as well as the images they produced were gathered together to provide a comprehensive account of young men’s grief, masculinities and risk-taking. Photos were useful in revealing not only the spaces and places occupied by participants, but also metaphors and symbols attached to grief and recovery. I utilized a narrative analytic approach to unpack the layers of meaning present within both the interview data and photographs. This process included a series of recoding activities to elicit narratives regarding self and in the positioning of the death of a friend.
CHAPTER 4: GRIEF

4.1 Introduction

Image 4.1 “Empty Bus”

The littlest thing reminds you of him. You never think that he’s not going to be around to ride the Sky Train with you. (Aiden, age 23—friend died from gunshot wounds following an altercation with police)

This first findings chapter provides an overview of the diverse ways young men experience, understand and describe their grief over their friend who had passed away. It provides insights about the influence of dominant social ideas about ‘masculine’ grief on young men, as well as the ways in which communities of practice influenced their ideas about a masculine grief identity. Focusing on the research question—“How do young men cope with the loss of a male peer an accidental death caused by risky behaviours?”—the first section of this chapter deals with grief or the affective, cognitive and psychological responses that followed the loss of a friend. It moves from an accounting of participants’ first responses to finding out about their friend’s death through the process of integration and, finally, grief recovery.

The second section of this chapter begins to deal with the second research question—“How does such an accidental death influence men’s masculine ideals, and their alignment to
those ideals? This chapter more explicitly focuses on the ways in which masculinities intersect with habitus and the ways that grief practices are shaped by a participant’s gendered communities of practice.

4.2 What is Grief?

While many life experiences are diverse, few people escape grief. Amid the load differentially assigned, the vast majority experience loss in ways that influence how we see the world. It is for this reason that authors of poetry and fiction, and scholars of psychology, anthropology, sociology and biology explore, describe and attempt to explain the phenomenon of grief. Most draw the conclusion that grief is an intensely personal experience, one embedded in social relations.

4.2.1 First Responses

While emotion was experienced powerfully by many participants, it manifested itself in unique ways. Some participants described a feeling of being stripped bare by the experience of grief. They felt like they had some protective wall around them that was instantly torn way and they were made vulnerable. Others talked about feelings of shock and disbelief that their friend had died. The pictures and quotes that follow reveal the ways in which participants discussed the various manifestations of feeling.

Nathan’s friend died after being stabbed outside of a bar in downtown Vancouver. He received the news by way of a call from a friend the day after it happened. Nathan described his reaction—he couldn’t believe it was true. His shock further intensified after hearing that the person who stabbed his friend was the cousin of his best friend—a guy with whom he had spent time as a child.
Missing is a feeling I felt because—I wanted to say I felt lost the whole day. I was just in disbelief, you know what I mean? I didn’t know what to say, I didn’t know how to talk to people about it. It was just so unreal that it was sort of something that I had to get through on my own. (Nathan)

Marty and Daniel also describe an uncertainty about how to be and how to express their feelings albeit in slightly different ways. Marty grew up in a small town where “everybody knew everybody.” His friend was killed in a car accident while driving drunk. In the car were two other people that Marty also knew. “They were pretty beat up but they were okay. They walked away but my buddy didn’t.”

As soon as he found out about the death, Marty visited the house of his friend’s mother. He says he felt upset until he took out a stack of pictures depicting his friend as a child. As soon as he began looking at the photos a feeling of numbness spread over his body. “I didn’t know what to feel or nothing. Ever since then all of my emotions have just been shut down.”

Daniel, a long time skateboarder and surfer, had never seen someone die but was accustomed to witnessing sports injuries. On a number of occasions, Daniel recalls being the calm one in the crisis. He stated:
I have been in many situations being at skate parks where someone will snap their leg in half or some shit really bad and everyone will be freaking out and I’m like, ‘you go get the ice and you go get a telephone and call a person, you do this, all you motherfuckers take 10 steps back!’ I’ll be the first person to just snap into it, that’s my instinct; I have been raised that way.

After finding out about the death of a friend to overdose Daniel reported that he “went third person.” Akin to what he described as his typical response to crises, Daniel felt unemotional and focused on the tasks to be done to facilitate his friend’s funeral.

Damien talked about his confusion and disorientation following the death.

![Image 4.3 “Empty Bucket”](image)

The only thing that I could really think of was an empty bucket because that is how I felt, just so empty and hollow inside and I just didn’t really know what was going on. (Damien)

Jim also felt a sense of emptiness. After his parents called him in Vancouver, from his home town in the Caribbean, to let him know about the death of his friend in a bike accident he said that he walked around in a daze for almost a week.
Do you see that chalk outline of a person on the wall? It’s just outside the library and I only just noticed it. That’s how I felt. Hollow, like a person someone could just walk by. (Jim)

The photos grouped in the category I have defined as ‘first response grief photographs’ encompassed some interesting themes of hegemonic masculinity. They have a starkness and grainy quality that signifies a coldness and aloofness. When describing the photos, participants describe feelings of separateness or removal while coming to terms with their inability to control the irreversible outcome. Likewise, the feelings of numbness, brokenness and emptiness described by participants are also characterized by the quality of disconnection. They are emotive but emotionless.

To go “third person” as Daniel states, is a masculine way of responding to a shock. He avoids being overcome with emotion or feelings and, therefore, has opportunity to be instrumental in the situation and bides time to determine what will occur next. He has not only concealed his feelings but is well positioned to be in control of others who, in Daniel’s opinion, are less rational.

Image 4.4 “Chalk Outline”
The feelings of hollowness, emptiness and removal described by participants can also be equated with a dominant masculine response. As illustrated in the quotes and photographs, a great number of participants described their disorientation and the way that they were paralyzed by the circumstances. They could not identify what to do so they, for all intents and purposes, became absent from everybody and everything. They disappeared from sight. This disembodiment, a removal from feeling, became their protection.

4.2.2 Integration

Most participants described a tangible shift in their grieving when the more intense feelings of shock gave way to a period of reflection about what the death of their friend meant to them. Within this space they started to integrate the reality of their friend’s passing. The grief over the death of a friend began to shape men’s world view, in some cases fostering doubt about commitments and ideas about what the future might hold.

Prior to the death of his friend, Joe viewed life as mostly predictable. He made plans, had goals and worked methodically towards their execution. As a young adult recently graduated from high school, Joe discussed his previous emotional world as “stable” without drastic highs and lows. After his friend died by falling through a glass ceiling, Joe experienced a dramatic shift in the way that he was able to reflect on life. The safe space created within his world dissipated, leaving him feeling raw and defenceless.
I took this because I was like… after my friend died, it’s like, well, that protection kind of comes off and you’re more exposed. (Joe)

Markus’s friend P. died after driving off the edge of a cliff. It was a particularly poignant death because of the brain injury that P. had suffered after driving off that same cliff one year before. All year Markus had thought about his friend and worried about his declining health. Every day, Marcus wondered if P. would survive his life so impaired. After he received the call telling of his friend’s death he experienced the physical transformation of the hard shell that he perceived to surround and protect him. His photo and quote depict cracked concrete.
Image 4.6 “Cracked Concrete”

I just felt like there were all of these cracks in me. Like, I would not be the same person. That’s why I took a picture of this concrete. (Markus)

Damien described the melancholy that lingered after the rawness of grief faded away. He speaks about the emergent understanding that life as he knew it was over. The part of his life that he had shared with his friend—dinners out, playing basketball, hanging out on Granville Island, camping—had come to an abrupt end.

Image 4.7 “Through the Fence”

I tried to focus in on this cage with this out of focus in the background because that is also how I felt. Because of the memories of what my friend and I did and where we went and, you know, I just felt so alienated from that, like it was gone and unreachable and in the background—kind of looking into my memories and realizing that they will just be memories, and you can’t make new ones like that. (Damien)
4.2.3 The Healing Time

Following an exploration of participants’ immediate grief responses and integration, the interview turned to an inquiry into the ways that participants dealt with their feelings of loss. Many spoke of healing, like its suffix indicates, as a journey not a destination. Participants talked about the process of getting through the experience of grief as a series of activities, some providing them with comfort and others contributing to a painful frame of mind.

Joe, like many others in the study, did not speak to anyone about his grief. He went about his daily activities as usual and chose not to tell co-workers or acquaintances about what he had gone through. Two weeks after the death he left his city home and went to his job as a wilderness camp leader until returning for the funeral.

I just kind of blocked it out ‘til the memorial, and did that, and then just kind of blocked it out again. Because it's just easier to deal with. Because I don't know how talking it through or thinking it through more would necessarily help with that. Because if I can just block it out, it's not going to be an issue anymore. For like, in my head. So it's the understanding of what that could do for me, more than what I already do. I don’t know if that builds up stress or whatever… I mean, my dad does it too. We just deal with it, and put it back, kind of there. Just ‘cause that, that kinda works, right? (Joe)

Rather than framing his solitary strategy from others as negative, Joe describes it as a positive experience. He found that taking the space to reflect on the death and the meaning of this death gave him solace. In this time of reflection Joe said that he came to the awareness that he needed to revise his understanding about “how the world worked.” Whereas previously he had assumed that he would live a long time before losing people that he cared about, he was now aware that he might have to endure the death of people his own age.
Again, referencing his photo of the house in construction (page 89), Joe spoke about the need to reconstruct ways of thinking to accommodate this reality.

Joe’s narrative contained three markers of what might be thought of as traditional masculine grief. He brackets his grieving, compartmentalizing it within a designated time that follows a logical progression. He uses words that are indicative of a mental toughness. He uses the phrase “block it out” twice, for example, to describe his ability to be unaffected, and to engage effectively in other activities. Grief will not overpower him because it is in his control and engaged with on his terms. Lastly, Joe reveals that this masculine code of grief management follows a patriarchal pattern. Like many masculine strategies, this one had been passed from father to son—“We just deal with it” Joe says.

In a similar way to Joe, Dylan did not attempt to process the death with others or reach out to friends to gain support. He was less ready, however, to draw on traditional masculine resources of detachment, control and rationality. Dylan did not find anyone within his family or peers who could offer him a way of being (maybe a way of being a man in grief) that he considered helpful. His retreat from others, however, had a gentler tone than did Joe’s solitary stance. He used time away to think about his friend’s death in a sentimental way, rather than redirecting his thoughts to avoid thinking about it. As a person involved in the drama club at his school, Dylan took a picture of a place that he went to practice his monologues as the setting for remembrance and reflection.
I didn’t really feel like anyone would totally understand what I was going through, so I kind of dealt with it on my own. It wasn’t a bad thing. I just found somewhere nice and remembered him. (Dylan)

For others, however, remaining silent about their grief was detrimental—an isolating experience rather than a healing one. Long-time best friends, Alex and his friend had not spoken in months following a falling out over rent money. The split between the two was so dramatic that their other friends felt forced to choose sides. When his friend was killed in a car accident, Alex had the sense that no one understood why he felt such intense grief over the death. He felt that others would begrudge his grief because of their disagreement and conflict.

I didn’t have really anywhere I could go do that really. I just spent some time talking with my girlfriend, but she was—you know, [she] didn’t know him, so it was, like, there’s a limit to how much I could really kind of mourn with her or around her. Again, my mourning was mostly internalized, I don’t know, like I didn’t really—it wasn’t something that I was able to, or just felt like I should anyways, externalize, like bring out, you know? Like put it out into the open, just, yeah, for various reasons. (Alex)
Because he felt like he could not express his feelings the way that he would have wished, Alex was in limbo and his feelings of isolation intensified. He described feeling ‘sad’ and ‘alone’ for a very long period of time.

Amir went to school that June, not knowing that his friend lay in a hospital bed following his motorcycle accident. He knew that something was wrong when he saw all of his closest peers huddled in groups, some broken down in tears. Amir recalled that one of his female friends ran up to him and shouted “Amir, Amir, don’t you know that E. is dying? He was in a crash.” Amir began hugging her and crying.

Throughout his grief process, Amir found consolation in his group of friends, his own family and with the mother of the friend who passed away. He found that being with people and sharing grief with others gave him the strength to get through the experience.

I just didn’t ever want to be alone. It’s part of my culture… we spend a lot of time together and the dead one’s memory is greatly honoured. (Amir)

Amir’s description of his own grief response is illustrative of a one that would be considered explicitly counter-hegemonic in relation to a Western context, but may be described as traditionally masculine within his Afghani culture. When asked about how men in his home country of Afghanistan express emotion he answered, “Men from my country, we are not afraid to love. We do all with passion.” In this he positions this performance of masculinity, subordinated in Western culture, as positive. He perceives the stoic non-expression of emotion and affection normalized within Western, White culture as, in some ways, dishonouring. “A person that you love dies and you must remember them with your heart and soul.”
In contrast, after his friend died from stab wounds, Nathan too felt compelled to reach out to someone but struggled to find the ways and community means to do that effectively. He, like many other participants, did not feel that his male friends would accept an emotional expression of grief. Instead he turned to a female relative.

My Aunt. That is the first person I called when I found out that he had passed away. She’s one of the only people I can really talk about this kind of stuff with so I called her and she kind of got me feeling a little bit better about it, but it didn’t really change much. (Nathan)

Even though Nathan appreciated his aunt’s support, like Alex he expressed a longing to grieve with others who knew his friend. As time passed and the silence around his friend’s death persisted within his group of friends, Nathan found himself feeling depressed and despondent.

But the thing is that I get so low about this, you know. Like I get down and I can't seem to get myself up. I just picture him laying there in his blood...No one to talk to about that.

The act of solitary grieving or connecting with community was not cause–effect in whether participants found the grieving process to be positive or negative. What did prevail as mattering was the availability of a timely support system. When men did not receive the kind of support they felt they needed, they attributed negative feelings or a delay in healing to this absence.

### 4.3 How Participants Dealt With Grief

Several participants found it helpful to engage in activities to move through their grief. These activities varied widely from creative pursuits, such as painting or writing, to vigorous exercise. This diversity of activities is situated as less hegemonic than other
strategies governed by control or rationality. This is consistent with Emslie, Damien, Ziebland and Hunt’s (2006) research on men, masculinity and depression in which they found that a minority of men sought out spaces of differences from traditional masculinities, rather than attempting to conform.

Amir’s room was filled with his artwork. Each picture included symbols and words that reminded Amir of the life and death of his friends. The artwork depicted his feelings of sadness and abandonment, each a query to divinity and the universe about the injustice of so much death.

![Image 4.9 “Memorial Art”](image)

After E. died, I really got into doing my painting. I think I’ve got pretty good at it. You can see in this picture a symbol of all the friends I’ve had that have been killed in the past two years. I post my art pictures on Facebook and anyone can see it.

(Amir)

In the weeks following the death, Damien’s mother, a school psychologist, gave him a notebook and a pen and told him that it would help to write a journal.
I think it was my mom that got me into it, but I just had to write down everything I was feeling at the time, just pour it on the page. Sometimes I would repeat myself a lot and just try and get everything out and dump it on the page. Even though I had talked to a lot of people and there were a lot of people I could talk to, this was also just another form of release for me, so I did that all of the time. (Damien)

David found solace in the graffiti art that he and his friend had once done together. He went back to a few of the sites and remembered the art experiences that they had shared.

It really helped to go and graffiti. Me and my friend, we were graffiti artists, and so it kind of took some of the pain away to go and do that. (David)

Quite a few participants engaged in exercise or sport related activities—many times these pursuits were ones that they had shared in childhood or adolescence with their friend who had died. Ethan, for example, met his friend on the basketball court when they were both 10 years old. After his death, Ethan returned to the same court to shoot hoops.
I went out and played some b-ball. (Ethan)

All participants relayed, in some fashion, the importance of a concrete task to deal with their feelings. A majority of the participants played sports, but team sports, however, served as a venue for men to discuss the death and its impact in their lives while engaged in competitive physical exercise. Rather than talking face-to-face, the death was discussed while kicking a ball around or shooting some hoops. The configuration of teams also provided a support system. This is consistent with Rosenberg’s (2009) findings. In his study of surfers who lost a peer to the ocean he found that participants turned to other surfers to face and deal with their grief. These groupings or teams might be considered particularly safe places, bringing together, as they do, young men of similar habitus in a familiar social field.

Engaging in physical activity fits within Martin and Doka’s (2000) concept of instrumental grieving or a more traditionally masculine orientation to working through sadness. Men are in action while grieving, complying with rules, adhering to patterns and working together to win. As in their game, there is a predictable pattern that can be bracketed and explained. They are doing gender while they practice grief.
4.4 Situating Substance Use

A majority of participants engaged in drug and alcohol following the death of a peer, but the way that men talked about substance use was largely dependent on the intended purpose of the activity. For some, including Stephen and Jose, emotional suffering drew them to the numbing actions of drugs and alcohol. For these men substance use provided pain management, dulling what was being felt. In this regard substances are used to bolster men’s purchase on masculine ideals of stoicism, self reliance and autonomy. They could depend on the substance to ease their hurt.

![Image 4.1 “The Liquor Store”](image)

Yeah, that’s where I went after I heard what happened to my friend; it was one of the bars we used to hang out at. I kind of just went and got really drunk. (Jose)

I just kind of let it soak in I guess, it was really hard to, really…. Actually, I was at home when, now that I think about it, I was at my house. I had just got home. I didn’t really take it very well. I kind of slipped up and did a bunch of MDMA [Methylenedioxymethamphetamine also known as Ecstasy] and got drunk for like three days straight. (Stephen)

Many others talked about getting together with friends to raise a glass or smoke a joint in honour of their buddy who had passed away. Central to these activities was healing through mutual support and sharing reminiscences. It was an affirmation that this friend would, in some way, live on in the collective memory and through this act they were making
a recommitment to their community. They are simultaneously mourning the passing of one of the members and celebrating their own perpetuity by embodying particular performativities and productions of masculinity through drinking and smoking together.

When describing this photo, Aiden spoke about sharing marijuana as a spiritual act of remembrance.

![Image 4.1 “Bag of Pot”](image)

This has happened at basically all of the funerals for my younger friends. [It’s] kind of like a communal smokers’ session of smoking marijuana where everyone basically lights up, and it’ll happen not usually right outside of the church, but in a park—again back to that common theme of where we spent all of our time. And you know, I guess it’s a sort of tribute, some people pour liquor, and there are just all kinds of things to do, and I guess that’s just sort of what we do. It’s just kind of—to me, the way it makes me feel, it’s a little bit like the ‘ashes to ashes, dust to dust’ kind of a thing and the smoke goes up into the clouds and stuff, and it’s kind of a spiritual thing, a spiritual tribute. You know, it makes you feel a little bit better for the time that you are doing it. (Aiden)

Chris talked about a place near a waterfall where he and his friends had regularly gotten together. A short while after his friend died, the group gathered again at their ‘place.’
It was more about me coming back and they wanted to have a good time, and at this point we didn’t discuss it as much because it was daytime and we were swimming around. But later on, at night, we kind of had a couple drinks and had a toast to our passing friend and yeah, I think he was in the back of everyone’s heads and I really wanted to mention it, but I didn’t want it to interfere with the activities of the day at the time, so I kind of left it for the closing of our night. (Chris)

In contrast to Aiden’s “group of guys,” Chris’s community was constituted by both young men and women. This mixed gender community of practice had previously gathered at this spot, and after the death, after their goodbye ritual to their friend, they found themselves there far more regularly. One by one these young people left the small town to go off to university in different parts of the country but every summer that one or more of them are back, they return to the special waterfall.

4.5 Grief and Masculinity

Grief is a socially constructed site of gendered practice. This has a number of implications. First, participants who sought out support from others primarily went to the women in their lives. Girlfriends, aunts, mothers and female family friends were invited to offer advice and talk about emotions. Those who did not have easily accessible or strong relationships with women in their lives reported a lack of support in this regard.
Second, men’s reflections on their grief process was made complex by a competing desires to be seen as embodying some hegemonically masculine qualities (strength and stoicism) while not wanting to appear to be unmoved by the experience. With the consciousness, for example, that public outpourings of grief are considered to be feminine, participants from White, Western cultures distanced themselves from this practice. Ben, for example, expressed his dismay with his girlfriend’s idea that he should have been more ‘out there’ with his feelings following his friend’s death. He felt that some men’s desire to avoid public outpourings of grief was a valid response. “For some guys crying in front of everyone isn’t that cleansing.”

4.5.1 Crying

Grief practices are gender performances—the way by which an individual constructs a masculine or feminine identity. Certain forms of grieving—stoicism, rationality and even displays of anger—fall under instrumental or hegemonic masculinity. Affective or emotional grief practices, such as crying, have been located as a feminine performance. While psychological literature asserts that both affect and instrumental grieving help an individual move through the grief process in a healthy way, men and women who grieve in ways that do not cohere with their socially assigned gender practice, report feeling judged and alienated (Martin & Doka, 2000). This masculine performance anxiety was evident through the interviews of many participants as they struggled with bringing together their own grief practices, hegemonic gender prescriptions, dominant masculine practices within their communities and their own critique of male stereotypes.

Shawn spoke about how, even though he did cry in the immediate moments after his friend passed away, this expression of emotion did not leaving him feeling better. For him, it
was more important that he was able to spend time thinking about the experience and processing it in this fashion.

Crying is a weird thing because right after he died, when I was in the hospital, I did cry and there was one other time that I did cry, but crying is not the “end all and be all” of letting out your emotions. That’s another misconception that I think people should get around, because it’s just that I think [our] tear glands just don’t work the same as women’s do. I have had girlfriends that can cry every fucking week, twice a week. I can just feel something in my stomach that feels terrible and it just won’t connect with the tear glands and I think that’s just how guys are. (Shawn)

In other cases, participants deprecated masculine grief, depicting it as “less evolved.” With bitterness, Aiden recounted the shooting death of his friend following an altercation with the police. In describing the aftermath, he acknowledged women’s grief as being more sophisticated and appropriate.

It’s a stupid male thing, but because it was a violent death, I felt a lot of retribution and revenge. I was consumed with anger and [the girls] went straight to the sadness, not to all the anger and stuff. I guess the maternal instinct ‘What about the baby?’ They went about it the right way, I guess, just honoured A. and did what they could to help out. We got carried away with the whole macho thing ‘oh I’m going to do this and I’m going to do that.’ It gets redundant, the tough guy and the macho goof. (Aiden)

Attributing a ‘maternal instinct’ as leading to a more mature response to the death, Aiden underscored a commonly held belief that women are naturally more equipped to respond to tragedy. He essentializes emotions as flowing from a biological place (sex) rather than constructed in gender. A correct (female) response is to express sadness, concern for other victims and honour the memory of the deceased. A common male response is to be ‘tough,’ ‘macho’ and angry.
The men’s communal performance of anger facilitated a performance of primal loss of control. They became the fighters, taking on the role of the defenders of true justice against the authoritarian police. The women in their peer group acted as a resource for this masculine performance, their quieter, thoughtful grieving acting as a counter-point for the positioning of a powerful, almost out-of-control masculinity. Though described in different terms, stoicism (quiet) and rationality (thoughtfulness) are located as feminine performances, making space for masculinity equated with performances of revenge.

Likewise, Jose noted men’s differential performances of masculinity. He took two pictures that were designed to represent its paradox (page 102). The first photo signified, what he described as, a man’s desire “to have other people seeing you be the man.” Jose talked about how young men enjoy working out in front of windows so that they can display their strength to others. In these situations of masculine performance, Jose maintains, men do not desire privacy. On the contrary, Jose believed that when men are having feelings or experiences that might not fit into hegemonic versions of masculinity, they hide from the camera.
In his pairing of these two photos, Jose illustrates a public and private masculinity (Hearn, 1992). While of poor quality, the man in the first photo is exhibiting his physical strength. He looks directly at the camera and smiles, demonstrating that he is both aware and endorsing the production of this strength-based image of himself. The second photo, while of sharper quality, is off-center, suggesting a quick snapshot. The photographer and the man in the photo are in a contest of speed, the man thwarting the photographer’s attempt to capture his image by covering his eyes (Aboim, 2010). This second photo might be interpreted to represent a reluctance to be captured in a private moment with no opportunity to reflect on or craft an image for the camera.

Jose’s two different photos exemplify Hearn’s (1992) view that, while public discourse of masculinity is powerful, it is often discordant with the private self. The two photos chosen by Jose are illustrative of the idea that photos can serve to reinforce hegemonic masculinities, but they can also serve to undermine it by capturing the spaces between performances.
4.6 Man Up

To “man up” is a commonly used axiom, generally used to direct a man to adopt a certain form of toughness. It can be also thought of as a way to police gender practices, by dissuading a man from acting in a feminine way. To explore the way that this social dictate acts to regulate masculine grief practices, one question in the photo assignment asked “What do you think it means to ‘man -up’ when dealing with grief?” Participants produced photos to address this and the themes were inductively derived to explain similarities across the men’s answers.

Damien took a photograph of a faucet with one drip of water spilling out. He captured this drop to indicate the tap had been suddenly turned off.

What does it mean to man up? I could only think of one thing to symbolize that, just kind of turning off the faucets and not being so emotional, not that it is bad to be emotional, but just being strong. I should have taken a picture of a rock because that would have been good too. I don’t know, when you think of manning up, for me, I’m sure most people too, just don’t cry. So you just turn off the faucet. (Damien)
In a similar thematic vein, Dylan’s photograph depicts the volume dial on the back of a computer.

It’s just a volume dial turned down. I think that term is just a judgmental thing. For me it just means to shut up and take it, or turn the volume down and don’t complain, deal with things silently I guess. (Dylan)

Shawn and Nathan also articulated that there were rigid social ideas about how men should grieve and what constituted acceptable expressions of emotion.

It’s harder for us because we get to absorb it, because we look like—excuse my French—like a bitch if you don’t try and deal with it in your own way. If a whole bunch of people go through a tragedy together, then yeah, you kind of lean on each other, but you kind of have to fight through it all on your own. That’s how you’re taught, that’s how you are brought up. Men are taught from an early age: don’t cry, it’s not your job… How are you going to be strong if you are crying it out? (Nathan)

Some of my friends, I have a strong suspicion that some of them have the illusion that to be a man you have to be macho and strong, and I think that a couple of them that are like that definitely have built-up emotions. (Shawn)

As these quotes indicate, participants had a powerful understanding of the masculine code regarding grief. Men should act to control affect rather than to let it happen to them.
“Turn it off,” “turn it down,” “fight through it” are just a few examples of a masculine approach to grief. As Nathan notes, this active approach to controlling grief is socially constructed and reproduced as masculine norm. There is a disassociation between strength and tears as exemplified in the quote: “How are you going to be strong if you are crying out?”

Damien’s, Dylan’s and Shawn’s quotes imply that there is a flood of emotions that men are not releasing. The image of the faucet and the volume knob depict the idea that sound and water are being intentionally shut off. Should the tap be released or the volume turned up, there would be an explosion of feeling, of the “built up emotion” of which Shawn speaks.

In response to the question, what does it mean to “man up”? Nathan expresses the idea that, however difficult it might be, all men must strive for independence. To “man up” implies something that goes beyond “boys don’t cry” and serves as call to take up a constellation of hegemonic qualities—strength, resilience and autonomy.

Being a man is harder than a lot of other people would think it is. You know guys that are more feminine than others, guys that are in tune with their emotions more than other dudes are. Most of the people that I know, most of the men that I know, doesn’t matter what race you are, they grew up the same way. They had to fend for themselves and had to kind of grow into this whole band of space on their own, with whatever guidance they have or whatever little guidance they didn’t have. So being a man is just kind of like trying to find your own way and building up from that. (Nathan)

Interestingly, Nathan subsumes all men under this umbrella of hegemonic masculinity. Even though he is Black and low income, he doesn’t see men of greater
privilege (some of whom are in his peer group) escaping the difficult road that men must walk. In this quote, men are united together by the misunderstanding they experience from, presumably, women and society at large. While Nathan does not go so far as to lay blame, there are echoes of Bly (1990) who suggests that men and masculinity have been wounded by a society that privileges feminine forms of expression (Clatterbaugh, 1990).

In contrast, Micah expresses dismay over his own stoic masculine performance. The photo assignment question “What is one thing that you can’t say?” was originally designed to capture feelings that the participant might not be able to verbalize. This is, in fact, how most participants interpreted the question. Micah, however, took a photo of a paper on which he had written “I love you.” This phrase, he said, was something that he could never say because it would make him too vulnerable in the world. “I feel it” he says, “but I just can’t say it, which is too bad.” He deeply regrets never telling his friend who died that he loved him.

Participants talked about the fact that they would never truly ‘get over’ or forget what happened to their friend. While the intense pain immediately following the death faded over
time, the memory of the loss has persisted over time. Being ‘better’ or ‘dealing with it’ meant knowing who you were beyond that death. The more healing that happened, the closer they were to living their lives, not in response to the pain but as a tribute to the memory of the friend.

4.7 Exploring What it Means to be a Man: Performances of Masculinity

A majority of the men critiqued the dominant social constructions of masculinity in some fashion. When asked how they would describe ‘masculinity’ a number of them defined hegemonic qualities of manhood as being materialistic, consumed with achieving a powerful physique, homophobia and objectification of women. Many participants admitted to taking on these performances in high school but moved away from such stereotypes as they grew older. A few of them mentioned that they did not want to be viewed as unreflective or uncritical in the creation of their own masculine identity.

Damien, for example, talked about the ways in which narrow ideas about what it meant to be a man were common among adolescents in his high school. “The immature view of being ‘the man’ in sports, doing a cool trick on your snowboard, having a nice car, being with a beautiful girl, just being the man.” He believed graduating from high school and coming into the ‘real’ world gave him a more realistic view of the multiplicity within the construction of masculinity. “I think differently now. There are so many okay ways to be a guy that don’t have anything to do with how rich and cool you are.”

Chris discussed the tension between the impossibility of fitting all men into a single common masculinity and the social pressure on men to conform to a dominant stereotype.
I think it depends very largely on the person. I think men are 48 percent of the world’s population, so to kind of speak of them as a group is kind of weird. There is the sort of ‘Spartan warrior’ archetype, and then there is the weakling loser type, and anywhere in-between. I don’t know how to even talk about such a group. I know that in my culture [Western, White] that I have grown up in I know that it is a cultural value to be strong and unaffected. (Chris)

In this way Chris is both contesting and aligning with the ideals of Western hegemonic masculinities. By speaking about the diversity in the male population, by implying that it is impossible to homogenize such a group, Chris is articulating Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) clarification of multiple masculinities. He alludes to the idea that there may even be different cultural interpretations of what constitutes ideal masculinity. On the other hand, it is unclear where Chris places himself, and whether or not he is associating himself with his own culture, a Western culture’s dominant masculine ideal. He stops short of identifying or rejecting the ideal, but nonetheless interrogates the availability or legitimacy of all its characteristics.

When speaking abstractly about masculinity and masculine values, many participants distanced themselves from being ‘typical men’. Within the context of the interview and in subsequent reflection noted in my field notes, I wondered if the function of articulating the critique of dominant or hegemonic masculinity was to demonstrate that they were not cultural dupes. While others may be influenced by the ideas of what it means to be, what Damien refers to as, ‘the man,’ some participants preferred to be seen as individuals forging a different path. This insistence on the multiplicity of their own identity is well placed. As Connell (1995) claims, masculinity is a life project. The making of identity and meaning is a complex process that is continually interactive with immediate situations, broader social
structures, gender order and regimes. Masculinities exist in the plural, indicating that each man performs different masculinities within different contexts (Butler, 1990b). Very few men, if any, conform to a single stereotype of masculinity.

In reality, the narratives were indicative of a complex and nuanced relationship with hegemonic masculinity. Dominant ideas about masculinity, however, provided a benchmark for a narrative that features the individual contesting or conforming to these performance indicators.

As evidenced in the discussion of grief responses, participants indeed practiced multiple masculinities. Men who insisted that they could not talk about their feelings or find the words to describe what they experienced following their friend’s death were the same ones who produced powerful images and quotes to represent their grief. Amir described his male idols as Tupac and Bruce Willis and then showed me his art depicting sentiments of love, hurt and sadness. Aiden spoke of his powerful anger at the police over the death of his friend and then, in another context, speaks of productively working with these same authorities to design a security plan for his business. These differential descriptions of a gendered identity are illustrative of the idea that, while one cannot avoid crafting an identity, it is neither stable nor immutable. Identity does not exist in an objective form but is constituted by the action of a subject (Butler, 1990b; Connell, 1995).

The creation of an individual’s identity is in constant relationship with the outside world. This research found that habitus and communities of practice were both influential in an individual’s masculine orientation to grief. The communities that formed masculine practices and the material conditions in which these communities were situated, to a large
extent, influenced a performance of masculinity and grief in the interview setting. The following second section details the ways in which communities of practice, as well as Bourdieu’s theory of practice, can be applied to show the ways in which a masculine grief identity is performed in the context of the interview.

4.7.1 The Adventurer

The narrative of the ‘Adventurer’ is one of the man who forged his primary masculine identity through the act of journeying out into the unknown—entering into new cultures and making one’s own way in the world. Participants who performed this narrative spoke of the death of a friend in comparatively rational way. The tragedy occurred and it meant something to him, but ultimately he brushes himself off and moves on to the next experience. He forever travels light, unencumbered by the weight of emotionality or regret.

Adventurers travel as a means to undertake a daring activity such as mountain climbing in Nepal, surfing in Thailand or skiing in Europe. Once this destination has been reached and the activity accomplished, the individual moves on to the next conquest. The lifestyle described by participants is conducive to their goals—temporary by design. These participants live in tents, sparsely furnished bachelor pads, communal staff housing or on a friend’s floor. If they have housing, they ensure that the lease lasts no more than a year. The idea of settling down in one location or of ‘landing’ anywhere for an extended period of time seems distasteful.
I’m kind of living both here and in Victoria. My girlfriend lives in Victoria. I go to school there but I’m here all the time… mostly to ski. I kind of just crash on whoever’s pad happens to have some floor. When I’m done school I’ll be off… maybe back to Ecuador. I guess you could say that I have itchy feet. (Marcus)

As a means of describing himself to me, Chris gave an account of his most recent hiking trip:

I’m a relatively outdoorsy person, so anytime I could go somewhere I would… recently, I was just in Iceland, and we actually walked up the glacier while it was completely, completely windy and snow was falling out on us, and I think we didn’t know if this was okay, if people had done it before. But we just wanted to get a really great shot of the volcano. I was there with a guy who was studying as a volcanologist, so we kind of just took the risk of, like, you know, that the ice won’t crack and that we’ll be actually able to just walk through it, and we won’t fall off the large glacier itself. (Chris)

It was Chris who initially signalled the idea of separateness or lack of attention to the emotional standpoint of others. Participants performing other narratives of masculinity spontaneously spoke about the response of their family to the death of their friend. They spoke about how those close to them expressed concern for their well-being. Despite having involved parents, Chris seemed confused when I asked him if his family worried about his own engagement in risk activities. He shrugged and said that he did not know. As though it had just occurred to him, Chris spoke about how, on a recent trip to San Francisco, he had been out of contact with his parents for a while. His mother had sent him a series of increasingly worried e-mails requesting to know if he was alright. He found this irritating as if the thought of having to respond would somehow dampen his experience.
Like his Adventurer counterparts, Chris takes pride in not being seen to be too attached to a landscape, activity or person. Too much connection to, or dependence on, something that he could not pack up in his backpack could compromise his freedom. The Adventurer must always be able to get up and move at a moment’s notice.

Through the narratives, however, it became apparent that the freedom that the young man held in such esteem is contingent on the goodwill of those who he meets on his travels. Because the Adventurer is travelling light (no or little source of income while he is on the road), he is dependent on the generosity of others in order to survive. Adventurer participants often spoke of staying in the houses of people whom they had only just met or camping out in their backyards. In addition, significant privilege is required to take up the activities that give the Adventurer cultural capital, including the economic resources to purchase items such as plane tickets or sports gear.

Those who narrated the Adventurer were, without exception, from a middle- or upper-class habitus. This helps to frame their expectation that they will be provided for. Just as they were able to trust that their parent’s economic security would buffer them from want, they are able to move through an adventurous lifestyle with the knowledge that the discomfort experienced on the road is a temporary condition. Their habitus has also conditioned them to believe that education and jobs are something to which you can return. Unlike their working-class counterparts, who may have been raised to hold fast to economic security, physical and financial risks for the cause of self-emancipation and discovery is acceptable and even encouraged by middle-/upper-class families.
As argued in Chapter Two, capital plays an important role in determining how one is positioned within a social space. Social capital can be characterized by the networks to which one belongs and the personal associations one is able to make. Social capital is exceptionally important to the Adventurer because, in order to maintain both their freedom and the material capacities to engage in sport and travel, the Adventurer must forge connections with other Adventurers—people who are accomplished in activities and have a shared passion for travel—who share or leverage resources.

For the Adventurer, cultural capital is indicated in the skills, qualifications and competencies that contribute to an ability to go farther off the usual trails. Stories of risking life and limb for the joy inherent in walking the edge of life and death are important elements of the Adventurer’s cultural portfolio—trophies in the form of scars, mementos and photos (Donnelly, 2004; Young, 1993). Stories of friends being hurt or killed in the course of adventure, while told with sadness and regret, serve as examples of the skill required to engage in these activities.

As previously stated, the Adventurer narrative of masculinity takes up the hegemonic quality of emotional disconnection. The attachment that Adventurers professed to feel about their families seem equivalent to those they met on the road. Associations with women figured strongly in the tales of the Adventurer, but these relationships have the quality of being transactional and short term. The stories of sexual interludes with women function to demonstrate the prowess of the participant.
Yeah, so I met these girls on the beach and we did some acid, and then somehow we end up at a house all together in this bubble bath. The girls were both strippers and they stripped for me. I ended up taking some pictures. (Daniel)

The photo above, taken by Daniel, illustrates the portrayal of good looking, charming young men and women partying—an easygoing, free-floating comradeship. Daniel also described this masculinity in the character of a cockfighter he met while travelling in Laos.

To me, for some reason, I find him to be the epitome of masculinity, because his talk is like the beautiful birds. They’re vicious, they are fuckin’ gnarly. I don’t care; regardless of your views on animal treatment, I definitely went and saw some cock fights and that shit is entertaining any way you cut it. Battle to the death, it doesn’t matter who you are, that shit will get you on edge. So they are amazing birds, and just the way that he respects it and treats [it], but how he is willing to sacrifice it. (Daniel)
Daniel admires the image of the man who is intimately involved in the creation of something beautiful but is detached enough to let it go when it has served its purpose. This metaphor fits well in the version of masculinity portrayed in this narrative and an orientation to losing a friend.

4.7.2 The Father Figure

This masculinity performed in the narrative of the Father Figure is, in many ways, a direct contrast to the masculinity of the Adventurer. The central characterization is that of care or responsibility for friends and family. The Father Figure takes care not to rely on or become dependent on others but speaks about being loyal and thoughtful of the needs of others. Some participants spoke of being a man in a similar way that one might speak of divinity—you create and then you care.

I think being a man is just about taking responsibility and pride for what you as a person are putting into the world. That’s what being a man is, you care [for] your relationships with women, you care for your children, and you care for your ideas. You need to care for your job, you need to care—I mean, it’s all good to not care, but you need to care about the right things, and for me, simply put, I’d say it is about caring for the things you put in the world. (Ben)

It’s more like a personal thing; I just like being that strong-minded person that is there for more people to rely on, more than for me to rely on people. That is just my opinion. I had a lot of buddies who came up and wanted to talk about it here and there, but sometimes when you have a conversation in a few months’ span of when it happens, there are certain things that people haven’t thought about or said in that time, and then when you talk about it a year or two later, there are certain things that people say, and it’s like, ‘I didn’t even think about that.’ It’s different, I know a lot of girls were impacted a lot harder too at the same time, but they are more emotional and stuff like that, so it’s sort of expected. (Shawn)
The social capital of the Father Figure is a strong network of family and friends. The interviews were full of references to family, partners, friends and colleagues. Likewise, the portfolio of cultural capital included a myriad of achievements culturally constructed to represent maturity and direction (education, career, responsible lifestyle). Similar to the Adventurer, this participant usually came from a privileged background. Unlike the Adventurer, he greatly values the virtues of stability and the masculine ability to provide for family.

While acknowledging the irony of the image of the lumberjack, Damien articulated an image of his version of masculinity:

Image 4.24 “Lumberjack”

I can only think of one and it’s this guy, the Squamish lumberjack. I wanted to get a picture or two of my stepdad and my mom and my sisters in front of the house... just like, as a provider, a husband, a father, a family man, all those responsibilities tied into one as well as a lumberjack. Being stronger and tougher and that kind of thing. (Damien)

The masculine orientation to grief performed by this grouping of participants is that of stoicism—the sturdy oak. While they acknowledge the personal tragedy incurred by the loss of their friend, each was careful to note that others had suffered more than he had. He spoke with pride of his part in taking care of other survivors (particularly the women in his life).
It was very common for these participants to state that they did not talk to anyone about how they were feeling following the death of their friend. Some worried that talking or thinking about the death would elicit difficult feelings in others or in themselves. To get overly emotional or to speak too much about the death could potentially upset someone, making the situation worse.

You don't want to trigger other people. When they're trying to deal with... and if they are dealing with it in a different way you, don't want to, you know, step on boundaries. (Joe)

The care and loyalty that these participants expressed towards their living family and friends also extended to the peer who has passed on. They were concerned that the friend who had died not be stigmatized as just another stupid guy doing a stupid thing. He took the trouble, therefore, to project an image of someone who was in the wrong place at the wrong time or the victim of others’ immaturity.

In response to a question about whether or not he considered his friend who died to be ‘reckless,’ Joe talked about the distress he felt when others assigned these negative labels:

How do you label somebody as reckless? How do you label anyone after they passed away? Like how do you, like why should you be able to you know? It's hard when know the person, like how are you calling that person something; you don't know that person, right? You don't know about their personality, you know, so it's odd having someone putting a label on someone that you know. (Joe)

4.7.3 The Lamplighter

The individuals whose narrative is of a Lamplighter is positioning himself as someone who has experienced, first-hand, the negative outcomes of lifestyles of substance abuse and delinquency and who has been inspired, in part or in whole, by the death of his
friend to make different choices. The reference of the Lamplighter, taken directly from interview transcripts, signifies a desire to be a role model for others from similar circumstances. Symbolically or literally, these participants ‘saw the light’ when their friend passed away. The death gave them new insight into the nature of their existence and they wanted a different future for themselves and others in their circumstances.

Levi came from an impoverished family with violent family members. When his friend was stabbed outside a Vancouver nightclub, Levi decided it was time for a change in his own life.

Image 4.25 “Lamppost”

This is a lamppost and it was daytime, so it wasn’t an honorary thing, but I guess it was a bit of an extension of the other pictures, because I want to kind of be a light to younger kids, but I’ve also had a number of mentors who’ve been a light to me.

(Levi)

This individual tells of negative events as part of the tapestry of his past. Narratives of pain, recklessness and marginalization are woven into the story as part of his life, and the life of his friend now lost. Rather than situating the death of his friend as ‘wrong place at the wrong time,’ the tragedy occurred as the end result of a constellation of circumstances, including a fractured family, violence, poverty.
The narrator is neither vengeful nor complacent. The masculinity articulated is generative, active and instrumental. This individual has vowed to create something beautiful out of something horrible. His friend’s life and death will catalyze change for good not evil.

The symbolic lamp draws its energy from the grief over the friend who has died.

Part of what I want to do is try and be a tech teacher and try and influence the young kids who grow up to stab people at nightclubs. I don’t think they were born that way, I believe it was because of the circumstances, and mostly the people that they have around them. So whatever I can do to counteract I kind of see as a tribute to him, because when I was first thinking about it, what had happened to him, I didn’t really have a lot of anger for the people that did it. It was more like, I don’t know who they are but they probably weren’t surrounded by the best people while growing up.

(Levi)

With few exceptions these individuals were from working-class or poor habitus. They had at least a few friends pass away and lived with the understanding that life can hold much heartache. These participants had integrated the experience of having a friend die and would like to ensure that this did not happen in vain. In addition to the chaos and fracture that existed in their families, an important component of masculinity was loyalty to your primary community. Along with the performance of a tough masculinity (further discussed in later chapters) one enacted manliness by giving friends a leg up when they needed it.

Noah’s friend died of a drug overdose. He talked about how his friend’s death represented a period of change.

When I was young I was a troublemaker, to say the least. When P. died, it was a transformation period for me because I was getting out of all of the bad stuff and learning how—I was learning more about myself than about everybody else. I was introduced to a lot of good people in that year, and pretty much from there my life took off for the better. Since I got caught and charged [for stealing a car], it actually
improved my life, because one of the conditions of my probation was that I had to go back to school. So I go to the probation office that I was assigned to, and there they actually had a school that was willing to take me. It was for kids that were in my situation and, you know, they had committed crimes and they wanted to do better. When I’m older, I want to be that person for somebody else. (Noah)

Ethan’s friend also died of a drug overdose.

I just looked at my life and it’s kind of, if I were to go today, like what would I have to show for myself and what I did with my life? I felt like I was having a good time, but I wasn’t fulfilled in terms of happiness or anything like that. I just wanted to be happy and wanted to be able to touch people like P. that are going through a hard time and let them know that it’s not as bad as it seems. (Ethan)

The death of their friend was the mediating factor in the shift to a new social field. Previously, the habitus had located them in a field wherein social capital may have been a connection to gangs and others in conflict with authorities. In the new field of the Lamplighter, social capital was to be a part of educational or religious institutions as well as pro-social organizations such as the YMCA. Narrations of the Lamplighter referenced ideals that rejected substance use and crime in favour of new friends and healthy practices.

The goal of the Lamplighter is to stay clear and motivated to achieve something that, they believe, would honour their deceased friend. Where previously they might have hidden in the metaphorical or literal shadows, grief has prompted these young men to be visible in the world as a shining light.

4.7.4 The Emotional Man

The narrative of the Emotional Man is a performance of vulnerability. These participants came to the interview setting ready to talk, sometimes unprompted, about feelings of loneliness, sadness and anger. They did not attempt to discount emotions (as did
the Adventurer), rationalize them (as did the Father Figure) or explain how they led him to a place of transformation (like the Lamplighter). These feelings and emotions following the death of a friend simply exist. The Emotional Man’s performance emerges more from a place of feeling.

This was exemplified by Amir who spoke about the devastation he felt (and still feels) following the death of his friend in a motorcycle crash. “I feel, oh God, why do you always take the good ones? I feel sad. Like sadness is coursing through my veins.” His eyes filled with tears and his voice shaking, Amir describes the darkness that has come into his life since losing three close friends. While he still socializes, still makes plans, his loss is clearly very present to him.

Aiden, as well, is visibly shaken by the death. He took a photo of where he went after he heard about the death. “I went to bed and slept for like 20 hours.” He talked about perpetually waking up in the night, shaking with anger and sadness.

Habitus was not a defining theme among participants who performed this narrative as Emotional Men emerged from both working-class and middle-class families. What did prevail was a community of practice. The participants who inhabited this narrative were either born in other countries or had parents who immigrated to Canada. They were, at least
partially, connected to communities that produced masculinity not at odds with sadness, despair and vulnerability. When reflecting on the gender questions in the photo assignment, the Emotional Man talked about masculinity as encompassing of the emotional world. They did not see being a ‘man’ or being ‘masculine’ as necessarily rejecting or controlling feelings that have been socially constructed as feminine.

Another common theme within the narrative of the Emotional Man was that of unfinished business. They lamented what they wished they could have said to their friend or done to prevent his death. These participants dwelt in regret, always wondering what could have been done differently.

There was a certain spot that I would go and smoke a doobie before I would take the bus. Every time I went there for a solid two months, I’d remember E., like every night, and would be like, ‘why the hell did you do that? How and why?’ It’s hard to say because it’s not like you can go back and ask him why he did what he did, right? And that is like some of the things that… some of us were allowed to be in the hospital and allowed to go see him. I think it was the last day before whatever they did afterwards, and you go in there and you get your one-on-one time, but it’s not like… you say all this stuff expecting and hoping for an answer back, but you can’t get it. It sort of sucks because you say your farewells, and after you leave the room, like 10, 15, 20 ideas come to your head that you think you should have said. That’s sort of tough too. (Ben)

4.8 Masculinities and Narrative Performances of Grief

In the ongoing construction of their masculine identity, participants drew on different cultural resources to frame their grief processes. In the narratives of the Adventurer and the Father Figure, habitus played a powerful role in determining what masculine resources were available to them. While doing so in different ways, they replicated middle-class values of masculinities—self-emancipation or self-reliance. The masculinity of the Lamplighter was
also habitus related. Grief motivated a shift from a life defined by criminality to a positive leadership role. While habitus was less important in the masculine narrative of the Emotional Man, culture and community of practice were salient. Gender relations played a role in all of the narratives—providing participants with counter-points and resources for performances of masculinity.

4.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined some of the responses to grief described verbally and photographically by the participants. I moved from the images and metaphors of initial grief responses to describing the way that socially constructed masculinity intersects with experiences and expressions of grief. In the second section of this chapter I described the thematic patterns in these performances of masculinity and grief and their relationships to social discourse and Bourdieu’s theory of practice.

The next chapter takes another look at narrative themes but this time with a focus on the way that participants told the story of the death of their friend. It centres on the way that participants assessed and made meaning of their friend’s death in relationship to the masculine ideals and notions of risk taking within their dominant communities of practice.
CHAPTER 5: LOCATING THE DEATH

5.1 Introduction

This chapter further chronicles the performances that young men engaged in as a way of doing masculinity in the context of grief. The chapter further examines men’s narratives, focusing specifically on the death stories told by participants. Through continuing to answer the research question: “How does such an accidental death influence men’s masculine ideals, and their alignment to those ideals”, this chapter explores the way that participants assess and account for the circumstances surrounding their friends’ death and the meaning they make from this. The masculinities produced within the communities of practice of participants, habitus and the social discourses regarding risk-taking are elemental to the way that participants understood the death and their ensuing grief practices.

5.2 Death of a Thrill-Seeker

As noted in Chapter Three, a number of the death stories were told by participants involved in communities of practice that regularly engaged in thrill-seeking activities and adventure sports. Within the context of this study, this thrill-seeking is defined by a set practices related to more extreme voluntary risk-taking. The collection of narratives was foregrounded by the understanding that some people have a great desire to go out and engage in activities that are avoided by most because of the increased potential for injury or the legal ramifications of being caught. Participants spoke of an intense longing to hone one’s proficiency in the risk activity to enable one to go higher, faster or with greater precision, competing for primacy in the field of practice. There is a thrill of setting one’s self apart from the general population through engaging in an activity within a restricted environment.
In his exploration of the symbolic meanings behind this voluntary risk-taking, Lyng (1990) invokes the term ‘edgework’ to signify the engagement in activities that carry a high level of risk “in which the individual’s failure to meet the challenge at hand will result in death or, at the very least, debilitating injury” (p. 858). Individuals doing edgework are perpetually negotiating the boundary between life and death, consciousness and unconsciousness, and sanity and insanity (Lyng, 1990). Participants engaging in edgework, as Daniel does, often explain the impetus as being the search for enlivenment.

You just feel a sense of freedom that you just don’t get when you are hunched over your computer in an office somewhere. It’s like you go out there and you hit nature and these fucking gnarly big mountains and you just want to conquer them, right? Its total danger and total, like, freedom. (Daniel)

In this way, Daniel illustrates a central idea within the edgework theory that sees working in low-risk, low-challenge jobs as driving one to engage in exciting adventure activity (Lyng, 1990). The repetitive daily work that many people do, does not serve to awaken the senses. Skiing down a mountain or flying off a cliff fills this function. Thrill-seekers belong to a community of practice with its own set of values and norms and, with reference to these, two narratives emerged that situated different deaths in contrasting ways: The narrative of the honourable death and that of the ridiculous death.

5.3 The Honourable Death

The first narrative theme, ‘honourable’, refers to the retrospective framing of a friend’s death, while engaged in a thrill-seeking activity, as worthy of respect. These friends and their deaths are described with reverence, largely because of a central belief that dying is the ultimate tribute to an activity that the participant engaged in with great proficiency.
While the death of a friend through this risk activity is described as horribly tragic, participants told of the calculation involved in undertaking sports like backcountry skiing, snowmobiling and mountain climbing. There was acknowledgement, among some participants, that if one spends a significant amount of time doing these activities, the yearning to take greater and greater risks gets stronger and the potential to make a fatal mistake increases. One assumes the risk that one could do irreparable harm to the body or worse.

Michael and Chris were two participants who have regularly engaged in adventure sports themselves. Michael is a skier and snowboarder who enjoyed his time in the backcountry. His friend died in an avalanche while skiing out of bounds. Chris’s friend was a mountain biker who died from injuries incurred following a bike accident. Chris spoke often about the exhilaration that his friend experienced doing his sport.

He got so much joy out of it, speeding down the steep tracks. You know, mud in your face, wind in your hair. He was totally known for being at the top of his sport. He wasn’t just a weekender. This was his life. He was only going to get better and better. (Chris)

There was recognition, among this group of thrill-seekers, that death may be the sad result of pursuing excellence in an adventure sport. There is also the shared belief idea that there is honour that comes about when someone dies doing that which gives him joy.
Oh yeah, He knew that he wasn’t supposed to be there. Every time we head out there it’s a risk. It’s an educated risk but a risk nonetheless. Nothing… nothing in the world is better than that power. It’s so untouched. And it’s only the dudes that brave it out that get it. And yeah, dying is horrible and the process is really quite freaky but if you’re going to die, why not die that way? You know, doing what you love.

(Michael)

There is an element of heroism in the narratives when a person seemingly embodies the traits of cultural icons that have risked it all and died. Michael reflects an orientation towards men’s health and mortality that, while it is ultimately impossible to avoid death, there is masculine strength associated with dying in the midst of a performance requiring courage and skill. There is a high value placed on not being seen as clinging (a term synonymous with femininity) to life by taking extraordinary measures to preserve one’s safety. One’s strength and courage to strike out into exciting and dangerous territories without being tethered by worry or anxiety is a way of confirming one’s powerful masculinity.

He had a lot of courage—not only doing mountain biking but just life in general. At his funeral, lots of people talked about that’s who he was. Just sort of an ‘in-your-face, no fear’ kind of dude. (Chris)

Even for those who are not engaged in sport, there is a romanticism projected in this cultural narrative. There is the image of a man frozen in the prime of his life, strong and vibrant forever, rather than a man who will eventually succumb to the inevitable weakness and fragility delivered by age. The discursive themes present in the narrative of the honourable death are reminiscent of the phrase “Live fast, die young and leave a good looking corpse” spoken in Nicholas Ray’s film Knock on Any Door (1949).
The complex process of social positioning did not end with an individual’s death but continues on in memory. Mixed in with the expression of grief over their friend’s death was admiration for a person who had achieved this self-defined brand of masculinity. The friend had paid the ultimate of price of embodying the man who gives everything, risks everything to be ‘harder, faster, stronger,’ but they have achieved something that few manage to do—to live on as a legend. It is fitting that the assessment of the death as ‘honourable’ emerges from the narrative of participants typed as Adventurer. Assessing a death in this way potentially gives the participant freedom from the long-term regret and sadness that flavours a death that is considered to be a waste, or is the result of some injustice wreaked upon them.

5.4 The Ridiculous Death

The term ‘ridiculous’ that is used to title the second narrative, is lifted directly from an interview in which one participant described the death of his friend using ‘ridiculous’ to sum up its outcome. The narratives are categorized as such because of the disappointment and derision with which the participants speak of their friend’s death. These participants tell the story of the death of a person accustomed to taking risks with life and health—with substances or in sporting activities—but who died as a result of his own miscalculation. The passing was not a tribute to the friend’s edgework identity but a sad story of a terrible mistake made in a moment of weakness.

Daniel’s friend, an accomplished surfer, died of a drug overdose.
His death was fucking ridiculous. If you’re out somewhere travelling, you die of, like, a surfing accident, not from some fucking prescription drug overdose. Everyone does drugs, obviously, but you don’t die from using them… [It] was totally ironic because this guy is totally this amazing surfer and he dies of a drug overdose on someone’s fucking prescription pills. (Daniel)

According to Daniel, the opportunity to achieve an idealized (hegemonic) masculinity was given up by his friend. The promise and potential of surfing fame was lost because he died, not high on his surfboard or under the water, but as a result of overusing prescription drugs. With the skill he had in his possession, he could have died in a way that would confer honour on his memory but instead he died in a suspect, wasteful way.

Likewise, Jason’s friend was known in his group of friends for his great talents in difficult and dangerous sports:

It was like, whoa, he died driving drunk on his scooter. Like, you would not believe the awesome skier this guy was. He was totally da bomb. Man, if he is in heaven somewhere, he is, like, slapping his forehead.

While the majority of death narratives categorized as ridiculous emerged in cases of athletes, one was drawn from the story of a drug user. As Lyng argues, edgework can also be engaged by individuals who tease the border between life and death through the use of substances. Anthony’s friend enjoyed a reputation as a seasoned recreational drug user. Anthony described his friend as a person who could always get the best highs. He could go to the edge of consciousness and never overdose, and he spoke of his friend as one would speak about an elite athlete, revered in his community. He said of the death, “This guy was as close to being a professional partyer as you can get. We were pretty shocked that he OD’d like someone who was a green user.”
The primary sentiment attached to these deaths is waste. The ways in which the narratives are framed could be interpreted as testament to how these participants would fear their own death story to be told. They bemoan their friend’s missed opportunity to be remembered as a hero—as someone who died in a blaze of glory. While it is unlikely that it was discussed prior to the accident, participants in this category seem to portray their friend’s death as somehow contravening agreed-upon notions about an acceptable way to die. These participants spoke about this death not so much as being ‘wrong,’ but as being the wrong one.

Centralized in the interview discourse was the notion that the friend should have had more precise judgment. The could-have-been hero should have known better than to take that drug without knowing what it was, or to crash while drinking and driving. The participants attributed their friend’s death as one caused by a miss-step, not in the context of the sport where it would have been acceptable, but through participation in the backdrop activity of using substances.

The ridiculous death narrative also illustrates the powerful nature of the social relations within the social space. The values transmitted in the communities of practice of the thrill-seeker produced a masculinity that was about hierarchy, control and mastery. They are, as Laurendeau (2008) cites, gendered risk regimes in which the most successful masculinity is the one who exists close to the edge but, because of skill and know-how, negotiates it with grace. The implication in deeming a death ‘ridiculous’ is that the individual has in some way betrayed this masculinity valued in the community. This lack of conformity to valued norms within the social space strips the friend of previously acquired cultural capital.
5.5 The Inevitable Death

The narrative of the inevitable death is characterized by a multitude of hardships. While participants deeply mourned their friend and the way that he passed, there was a direct or indirect implication that death was only one of the tragedies visited on the life of this young man. A deprived childhood, a fractious family life, the early death of parents, abuse in foster care, drug and alcohol addiction and violence were but a few of the elements that characterized the lives lived by some of the participants. According to these men, the tragedy posed by their friend’s death may not have been the worst event visited on his existence.

The pattern of misfortune endured by the participant and his friend extended beyond the individual to a multitude of hardships that faced by their wider community. Participants described the death as painful but, because it was part of a pattern of deaths, it was not out of line with how they imagined the future of other peers. A few participants stated that they too envisaged an early passing for themselves. A poignant example of this was in my interview with Jacob, a young man who had experienced the death of so many friends that he had difficulty narrowing it down to one to talk about.

Jacob: Okay, yeah, there’s been a lot of friends die. My friend T., his brother. He died and we were close. I forget his name though.

Interviewer: That’s okay.

Jacob: He died drowning this one year; it was about a month after my grandmother died. He died drowning at the water. They were partying, jumping in to this creek that feeds in to the lake, this lake in my hometown. They were jumping in and the current pushed him about 30 feet out in the lake. Like, we always did this together with them. They were friends of my family’s growing up, so we always hung out with them and so we would always do this. We would
go out there and do this and then I found out that happened to him, that he got sucked under.

All of the ‘inevitable death’ stories included substance abuse as a contributing factor. Either the friend had died of an overdose or had been killed in a motor vehicle accident as the result of driving under the influence.

Stephen’s friend died of a heroin overdose in his girlfriend’s apartment.

Stephen: It sounds like from the people that knew him better, that he had been going through a rough time and been dealing with addiction and stuff so...

Interviewer: Was he living on the streets?

Stephen: Yeah, he was living out on the streets.

Interviewer: It’s a tough life.

Stephen: Yeah, it seemed like it. I mean, it seemed like he had a good place to sleep that was regular, but it sounded like he was going through a lot of other stuff in general. I heard he left his parents’ house because he ran away, technically because of a shirt. His dad wouldn’t let him wear this shirt, and he was like, fuck it, I’m gone, and he left. I would imagine that was probably just the last straw. There was probably more to that, I’m assuming.

Jose took a photo of the Sky train station to illustrate where he and his friend spent time together. Both Jose and his friend were regular drug users and, aside from the brief periods of time spent living with friends, they were homeless.
Jose described his former life, homeless and drug addicted, as one fraught with danger. In one sense, acquaintances he made on the streets who were also engaging in regular substance use were the closest thing to a family. Drug use and poverty, however, led to relationships among users that were often characterized by betrayal and cruelty. In turn, when Jose’s friend died of an overdose, he wondered about the possibility of a wrongful death. A long-time drug user living on the streets, Jose surmised that his friend eventually pushed his dealer too far with the amount of debt he carried.

Well, I had one of my friends, he was a crack head—I guess someone gave him a bad batch or something and he didn’t react very well to it, and he had a massive overdose and some other problems and ended up dying in the hospital. (Jose)

Jose, Stephen, Ethan and other young men who characterized their friend’s deaths as inevitable described their communities of practice in similar ways. These communities were stratified by the degrees of strength and toughness performed by its members and to enact a successful masculinity involved having enough potency and prowess to defend whatever was considered precious. This might involve defending symbolic possessions such as honour and reputation and, because of the significant level of deprivation present in the communities,
material possessions. As will be discussed in more detail throughout Chapter 6, survival on the streets demands a presentation of invulnerability.

### 5.6 The Unexpected Death

In contrast to the bleak future articulated by inevitable death, the participants who assessed their friend’s death as unexpected perceived their friend to be on a promising path. These friends were the university students, high school athletic stars, classical musicians, the children of highly educated parents and accomplished peers. They friends were mourned for the loss of potential; their bright future extinguished by a moment of bad judgment. The narrative theme of this section is titled as such because these are the lives that are widely understood to be of great value.

Damien spoke of his friend as a popular basketball star who, at the end of grade 12, had been scouted by major universities across North America. After he died, hit by a bus downtown on graduation night, the entire school mourned his passing. A basketball scholarship was designated in his name. His family, in partnership with the school administration, still fundraises to fill the coffers. In answer to the photo assignment question: “how do you remember your friend?” Damien took a photo of a basketball that had been signed by his neighbour.
So, this was taken at his house—all the balls that people signed. His original basketballs. So this was his neighbour that wrote on the basketball a story and stuff. It’s stuff like this you can’t really explain to people that weren’t there or to someone that didn’t know him, how much he loved the game and how much people loved him, and the impact of both those things mixed together and [how they] had influence on each other. (Damien)

The note on the basketball is written to Damien’s friend’s mother, father and twin sister. The teenage author writes of the way that Q was considered a ‘mentor,’ an ‘inspiration’ and a person worthy of great praise. “He was an idol to me and he led by example. The thing about Q. was that he earned respect just by being the great kid that he was.” Damien goes on to talk about the many positive memories that he has of Q., a reassurance to his family that he will always remain in his heart.

Shawn and his friend had been close since elementary school, playing on the same soccer teams and hanging out at special family events. He describes his friend as multi-talented, popular and from a ‘good home.’
Micah describes his friend’s popularity as so assured that, instead of having to publically perform his athleticism and hide his art, in order to establish a strong masculinity, he could do the opposite.

E. was a pianist and he was good at art and he’s quite artsy on the surface, but he was also a good athlete on the low, like in secret and I as well. He was very musically talented, but we used make music together. He used to make most of the notes behind it and used to make the drums or the different effects behind it because with electronic music these days it is all different. (Micah)

Joe’s friend died when he crashed through the glass ceiling of a house while attending a party. It was a beautiful June evening and, after a few drinks, a group of guys climbed to the top of a building overlooking the beach. Walking on the roof, Joe’s friend, T., walked over a skylight that wasn’t strong enough to carry his weight. When the news of T.’s death began to circulate among the wider community of their friends, there were the usual questions about why the young men had been up on that roof so late at night? Why had they taken that sort of risk? Joe said that the simple answer had been that T. wanted to get a “better view.”

I think that was kind of a reflection of T., and who he was. What was said, he was trying to get a better view, and trying to see better… so I imagine him, you know, trying to improve himself, or improve what he’s doing or change what he’s doing or see if there’s something different that could be done. And I think that kind of represents him and his personality too. (Joe)

Joe described the way that his friend died as a kind of representation of how he liked to live his life. T. was just starting out at university with dreams of becoming an engineer and he wanted to create innovative structures that would enable people to live in environmentally friendly ways in the midst of the city.
The deaths of these young men shook not only the lives of their friends, but their entire communities. Just as Damien’s school held two funerals for students and parents to attend, other participants’ home towns and neighbourhoods set up scholarships. Shawn’s friend had a national piano award set up in his name. Joe’s friend’s parents coordinated a sports scholarship with his former high school. The central implication of these acts was that memory of these young people will carry on as an example of great lives cut short. Other accomplished young people will have the opportunity to carry on and do the things that the deceased would have done, had he had the chance.

The friends of those who died ‘unexpectedly’ were strengthened by the public display of grief and mourning for the victim of tragedy. While they each had their own private feelings and responses, participants all expressed the sentiment that their sense that something good was gone from the world was validated. This confirmation eased the grieving.

Of all the narrative themes, the young men with friends who died an unexpected death described the greatest plurality in the masculine performances of grief. Because of their habitus and the way that various forms of capital situated them within their social spaces, these participants perceived less pressure to enact a hegemonic masculinity. They were most likely, of all participants, to seek out support or engage in less hegemonic grief practices such as art, music or creative writing. This finding is also articulated by De Visser and Smith (2006) as well as O’Brien, Hunt and Hart (2005) who found that men with the most social capital feel less obligation to conceal vulnerability or deny ill health.
5.7 Substances, Masculinity and Social Spaces

One of the primary goals in the recruitment of participants to his study was to obtain diversity in ethnicity, socio-economic status and social practices. To the extent that this relatively small sample allows, I was able to achieve this goal. As stated, the communities of practice and the social spaces that they occupied were highly salient in how the death and its meaning were constructed.

There were great distinctions in the setting of the narrative—both in the physical spaces and the accompanying social discourse. The settings described by participants are of the deaths on top of the snow-white mountain, the death on the gritty urban streets of Vancouver, the bright suburban crescents or barren and isolated small towns. As previously described, within each narrative were descriptions of specific social relations within these separate contexts. The same practice can take on different significance according to the setting, for example, the differential ways that participants discussed substance use.

5.7.1 Conquer or be Conquered: Substance use in the honourable and ridiculous deaths

Substance use has a very specific function in the social space of thrill-seekers. While many thrill-seekers engage in alcohol and drug use it is conceptualized as a facilitator—it is always considered as a backdrop to the shared practice of thrill-seeking. It is a practice of socializing, of bonding and of relaxing after a day of exercise.

Daniel grew up in a suburb of Toronto but spent much of his young adulthood travelling around Asia surfing and doing photography. Daniel’s friend died of a drug overdose in a small surfing town in Australia a few months after he had moved there. Daniel spoke how of he and his group of friends engaged in drug and alcohol use following an
afternoon on the waves. Getting high or buzzed was an extension of the bonding that had occurred through doing a sport together.

    Yeah, so we’d sleep-in ’til about noon and then go out and surf our asses off. And then we’d go to the beach and drop some acid or smoke a doob or whatever and then surf some more or just party. We’d just kind of, yeah, gather in the evening and hang out doing whatever and drinking. Sometimes we’d skateboard or… do whack tricks and watch the other guy. (Daniel)

    Daniel, like his athletic counterparts, intentionally conveyed that it was act of doing sports that made the man. Substance use, while highly acceptable in the community, was allowable only after one had enacted a dominant performance of masculinity. One must first conquer the ocean or the mountain before engaging in the pleasurable practice of getting high. Even in cases where the thrill-seeker is drunk or high, he should always be sufficiently in control of his actions.

    Thus, for the thrill-seeker, the worthy opponent is the environment in which they test their skill. The most significant marker of strength is to not be defeated by anything but the most powerful of elements. For this reason, a death in the sports-scape is a loss in a fair fight. In the honourable death, the thrill-seeker fought the environment and the environment, this time, won out. It was a laudable fight and a respectable death.

    For the thrill-seeker, a death by way of substance overuse or misuse is akin to being conquered by an inferior being. It is the lead actor being outshone by the supporting actor or an extra with a couple of lines. It was a well articulated community norm that, as an accomplished actor within sports-scapes, one should be not seen in a position of being overpowered by substances. The friend who had the misfortune to die in a ridiculous way
made the mistake of not using substances in the way that they were meant to be used. The substances were controlling rather than controlled.

So, while the honourable death signifies the achievement of a version of hegemonic masculinity, the ridiculous or wasted death represents a failure. He died the ‘wrong way,’ thereby reconstructing his strength-based identity as one of weakness and fragility. He wasted the talents and skill at his disposal by behaving irresponsibly with alcohol or drugs.

5.7.2 Addict or Partyer: Substance use and the Inevitable Versus Unexpected Death

An equal number of participants who narrated the deaths of friends from ‘inevitable’ and ‘unexpected’ perspectives had deaths related to the use of substances. Like participants in the previous section, the description of the role that substances played was very different. Most of the participants who considered the death of their friend to be ‘inevitable’ spoke about substance use in terms of addiction.

Ethan and his friend P. grew up together in a poor Vancouver neighbourhood. Both of them had family lives characterized by violence and chaos. In their early teens they became heavily involved in drugs and alcohol.
Ethan: To be honest, when P. passed away, he was dealing with addiction issues and stuff like that and I was going through alcoholism.

Interviewer: Was it tough to be friends with P. while he was struggling with addiction?

Ethan: Yeah, he had this dark side to him whenever he was drinking. You never saw it coming. He would just want to beat someone up and then after it was done, he would just be back to a normal, smiling, happy guy. If you were his friend, then you were okay, but if he didn’t know you, then it was a different story. He was definitely battling with some demons.

Jose discussed the ways in which the only people that he associated with, at a certain period in his life, were drug addicted. He describes his friend as being the single person in his life who did not try to “use” him.

Well, I was on the streets for a while and also a crack head at the time. He was one of the only people that didn’t take advantage of me and shit. He would actually talk with me and helped me a lot and gave me a place to stay on a couple of occasions. He was actually the only person that tried to help me at the time. (Jose)

For young men from impoverished communities, stories about carefree moments of happiness and relaxation were infrequent. Life spent on and off the streets meant that few had stable housing or many positive relationships. Substances, therefore, were often used to escape the hardships of daily life. Marty, an Aboriginal man living in Vancouver, talked about how difficult it was to stop getting drunk on a regular basis.

I think we just drank and shit to get through the day. Lots of people have family shit. Like my friend’s father beat the crap out of him. (Marty)

Addiction within the families of these participants was multi-generational. They had grown up seeing their parents drunk or high. Some had spent time in foster care because of
their parents’ regular intoxication. Within these participants’ communities of practice, the struggle with substance use was so normalized that some participants centralized their discussion, not on the very fact of illicit drug use but on the quality of the drugs.

I think I am glad that we didn’t lose anybody else. I mean, it wasn’t even like it was an overdose from him doing a lot. I think he was just a bit too drunk and it was bad dope. That’s what everyone has been saying. A bunch of people overdosed off of a small amount, there was only like a ten-spot or something, I don’t know exactly what that weighed out to, but I don’t know, he shouldn’t have overdosed on that. (Stephen)

As research has shown, many young men use substances to both bolster a performance of a courageous, aggressive, powerful masculine identity as well as to allow for the expression of more ‘unmanly’ emotions such as sadness or vulnerability (Capraro, 2000; De Visser, 2009; Harris, 2008). Young men from marginalized communities often engage in alcohol and at an earlier age than young men from wealthier communities (Canada, 2009). This substance use continued as the need to enact a masculine toughness on the streets intensified.

Drug and alcohol use was so regular and long term that a number of participants talked about how it had become a dependency—both physical and as an emotional and social strategy to survive the streets. Many participants spoke of their issues with substance use and the damaging effect that it had on their life. This created a paradoxical relationship between substance use and masculinity. As noted in the discussion of the ridiculous death, drug and alcohol use that is out of the control can signify a weak or subjugated masculinity. Instead of helping to facilitate mastery over self and others, substance dependency can represent desperation and neediness.
By contrast, a reporting of substance use by young people of greater privilege had a tone of rebellion. These participants talked about drinking and drug use as a platform from which they could see the freedom that they imagined adulthood to be; and while they knew their parents were aware of their use, younger participants spoke about the thrill of getting away with doing something of parents would disapprove.

Drugs and alcohol were primarily used as a mechanism for bonding, socializing or partying within this group. Unlike the narratives of marginalized young people, substance use, regardless of the regularity of use, was never portrayed as problematic. This was the case even when being under the influence was a contributing factor in the death.

Micah: We would kind of just party together and things like that and go to parties and hangout and whatever, stuff like that.

Interviewer: How often did you guys party?

Micah: A lot. Like, we partied pretty regularly. Grab a case of beer and let loose. Almost every night in the summer.

When substances were being used at the time of the death, there was either little credence given to their influence or doubt expressed that the deceased was under the influence.

I wouldn’t consider it reckless. I mean, because I don’t really know enough about what happened. Like, it could have been more an accidental thing. I don’t know if or how much they were drinking, if that played anything into it, and so it was just a left-untouched thing, which, you know, the family probably doesn’t want that to be talked about if it was the case. (Joe)

Substance use, social space and the achievement of a successful masculine performance interact in complex and often contradictory ways. Substances are used to bolster
masculinities but, when they are considered master instead of servant, they undermine masculinity. Not insignificant are the differential resources that participants of differential habitus possess to both set the frame for interpretation and strategies to manage drugs and alcohol.

5.8 A Study in Contrasts

For the sake of organization and coherence, it would be tempting to convey the idea that the location of death stories was binary in nature. Honourable death is directly opposite to the ridiculous death. The inevitable death stories wholly contrast with the unexpected death story. Such is the nature of genre. It provides a culturally recognizable template for the teller to relay the story so that the listener can understand it (Elliot, 2005). So structured are the frames of genre stories that the narrator and audience can almost predict the message or the moral transmitted at the conclusion of the tale.

While fracturing narratives into thematic categories is useful for discerning cross-sectional patterns, it is also useful to note the places where narrators deviate from the story genre. These moments in the interviews, even if they only existed in a sentence or a thought, gave insight into the components of the story to which I was not privileged and the dynamics of grief that I was not seeing. This process also led me, as the researcher, to inquire more deeply into the place of the narrator in the story and what might underlie the subjugated narrative performance (Hartmann, 2000).

I return, again, to Aiden’s story that had many of the hallmarks of an unexpected death. His friend grew up in foster care and struggled to “make good” with few resources. He overcame addiction issues, moved in with his girlfriend and fathered a child. Aiden’s friend
was the legendary ‘bad kid gone good’ whose life was destined to improve. As a man who had outgrown his self-defined immature delinquency, he was poised to make a contribution to society.

When he got brought into foster care, I don’t recall the exact circumstances because we were a little bit young, I’m not sure if he was in legal trouble, but I do know that he had been experiencing with drugs at a very young age—at probably ten or eleven years old, which is quite young in my opinion. Within, it didn’t happen instantly, but within a year or a year and a half there was huge changes and he never went back to it, besides smoking marijuana and drinking I guess, which is still a negative, but everyone was doing it. You know what I mean, but he never went back to really having any issues like that. He really got his life together. He always worked. He wasn’t a bum by any means. He was always doing something, so yeah, I think that they definitely had a positive influence on his life and really helped get him in order. I think it was more that he didn’t really have a solid family before, and to people that don’t have it, I think the family thing means a lot and to people that do have it, you can kind of take it for granted sometimes. So it was great for him, definitely. (Aiden)

As evident from this quote, Aiden was careful to distance his friend from the life of tragedy (implicit in the inevitable death stories) by clarifying that he was not involved in illegal activity, he did not do drugs (aside from alcohol and marijuana), he worked and he cherished family. Narrating his story in this way facilitated the telling of the unexpected death story.

Aiden is a unique participant who straddles two social spaces. Unlike others in his circle of friends who grew up in a poor suburban neighbourhood, Aiden speaks with some pride about being one of the few to escape the cycle of gang involvement and jail. He described being on a bus one day and seeing a sign advertising a BCIT (British Columbia Institution of Technology) program in marketing. Aiden knew at once that he wanted to do
that certificate and proceeded to register for the program and complete it in two years. After being employed in the industry for some time and achieving success, he began to connect and identify with professionals in his field. He was able to buy a house near Main Street in Vancouver and make plans to marry his fiancée. In his own words, he has wealthy beyond anything that his family ever thought possible.

The characterization of an individual who grew up in a rough and poverty-stricken neighbourhood, however, was prominent in Aiden’s narrative. His most cherished memories are of playing basketball with his buddies and hanging out in the park. These are the friends he could trust to watch his back. These experiences, as Aiden states, “made me who I am today.”

As Aiden’s interview unfolded it became clear that he was caught between the privilege of his position in the middle class and his working-class habitus. The story that Aiden wanted to tell was a story of a random shooting because he understood, from his experience in the dominant class, that this story carries no stigma. He could reasonably assume that I had no experience of the complexities wrought by socio-economic marginalization and would not have a personal experience with this repression that young people feel from authorities (Kennelly, 2009). Thus, in order to enlist me in an outrage against a police force, he constructed a narrative in which the police would target him, his friend and even me.

Aiden felt like he owed this account to friend, who had his back as a young person. He wanted to defend his memory against the stereotyping that he observed happening to so many of his peers. Conversely, Aiden’s current field, outside of his habitus, provided him
with a different lens on the events that had transpired. During the latter part of the interview, his story made subtle shifts as he seemingly experienced discomfort with the single dimensional narrative he was relaying.

No disrespect to my friend A., but maybe they shouldn’t have gone out that night, maybe they should have been staying at home with the child and stuff like that. I guess those kinds of things cross my mind, maybe when my girlfriend has her—when we have a baby eventually, I don’t want to put my family in those types of situations by going out and getting too drunk and stuff, you know what I mean?

He began to speak less about the way that his friend had made changes in his life and began to describe the challenging conditions of his life, as his friend sought to overcome deprivation. While he stopped short of narrating the story of an inevitable death, his anger was restricted. Instead of placing blame on the police because, as he said earlier in the interview “[they] would shoot anyone,” he held the police accountable for targeting a young man just because he was a young man.

I think it’s a lot of judging I find, and it’s for all races. It’s by no means just White males. I just find that if you are younger than 35 and you maybe dress or look a certain way, or if you don’t have a child with you that there is a lot of sort of assumptions that you might be a bonehead that’s into certain things and especially from the police. There is definitely an attitude [towards] us. I’ve seen them talk to older men with a lot of respect and then they come over and talk to younger people and treat us like they assume that we all have guns and crack, which isn’t true. (Aiden)

I was able to interview four friends of one young man who died. Ben, Shawn, Amir and Micah all tell story of their friend E. who passed away in a motorcycle accident following a night of drinking. While the events surrounding the death are told in a similar manner, the way in which the death is narrated is different. Amir, Shawn and Micah relay the
story of an unexpected death. They describe E.’s many talents and gifts, all practiced under the umbrella of his supportive family.

While they agreed E. was not living in a deprived environment, Shawn and Ben were less hopeful for his future and saw his path to success as less foregone. Ben made reference to the fact that E. had gone a different way than the rest of them and that he was involved in the ‘party scene’ with more intensity. Ben commented that his friend had been involved in ‘numerous fights with his mom’ over the fact that she thought he was involved in drugs. There were bar fights and trouble with school authorities. Shawn, too, expressed concern:

He just hit this high school kind of scene; he went and he partied hard and I was more into making money at the time when he was trying to party and stuff. So I didn’t really go out and try and get fakes and go clubbing, and then as soon as it happened, that means he can’t turn 19 and he can’t do all of these other things. (Shawn)

There are numerous reasons for a narrator to situate a story in a certain way. There are loyalties, histories, biases that I, as the researcher, can never fully understand. The deviations or the outlying statements are never to be ignored as they are a powerful demonstration of the ways in which discourses of power and knowledge, material disparities of wealth, habitus and habitus shifts as well as positional suffering are influential in the development of narratives. They are illustrative of the concern that young people feel about the ways their identities are crafted by a variety of intuitions—the media, the educational system, the legal system, to name just a few. The way that death stories are narrated and located speaks powerfully to the nature of stigma and the ways in which it is contested.
5.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the ways in which participants assessed their friend’s death—the post-mortem. A community of practice guides an evaluation of the implications of death. Within the gendered risk regimes of the thrill-seeker, strong themes of masculinity are present in the assessment of deaths as being an active conqueror (honourable) or passively conquered (ridiculous).

A salient idea in this chapter is that the ways participants assess the death is generally congruent with how society differentially views the death of young people of differing circumstances (McNeill, 2008). Participants mourning friends whose lives are more easily “grievable” (Butler, 2004) are supported by a society who understands this loss of life to be momentous. This social support can serve to ease their grief. In addition, as evidenced by contrasting discussions of substance use, participants from more privileged positions are less likely to view the substance use in their communities of practice as problematic. Because of the ‘unexpected’ nature of their friend’s death, the relationship between regular drug overuse and the friend’s accidental passing was not understood in that way by some participants who noted its inevitability.

This chapter concluded with a discussion of the ways in which participants contested public (or potential interviewer) assessment of death. This is an important note because it illustrates participants’ awareness of the stigma visited on lives not celebrated and deaths not sufficiently honoured.

The next chapter will turn to an extensive discussion of communities of practice and the different ways that masculinities are performed as risk taking. I will discuss how grief...
practices, within communities, can alternately discourage or facilitate the modification of risk practices.
CHAPTER 6: COMMUNITY, RISK AND MASCULINITIES

6.1 Introduction

I’d say to live the life that your friend wanted you to live and don’t… just ‘cause you are moving on doesn’t mean you have to forget. I was trying to think of what I wish someone said to me… mostly just to live the life that your friend wanted you to live because that is the best way to honour him. (Damien)

This chapter will extend the discussion through an exploration of the way that a crisis, in this case the death of a friend, has the potential to disrupt rigid and unhealthy masculinities. The first section of this chapter will focus on communities of practice and the performance of gender. It will address the research question: “How do communities of practice reproduce a masculine identity through the performance of risk activities?”

In the second section of this chapter I will discuss how grief, in the aftermath of a friend’s death, serves as a liminal space in which masculine identities and practices can be reconstituted. Specifically, this section will investigate the research question: “How do men shift their risk-taking and health practices after the accidental death of a male peer?” Through addressing the phenomenon of a modification in masculine identities and the role that the participants’ community or peer group played in facilitating or discouraging this shift, I will explore the tension individuals experience between shifting the practices from within the community and choosing to leave the communities whose practices are too embedded to change. Finally, I will discuss some interpretations of the question: “What does it mean to ‘man up’” and its relationship to an evolving gendered identity.

6.2 Communities of Practice and Gender Identity

Most of the participants talked about the important role that their group of friends or their communities played in their lives. This was consistent with literature that suggests
adolescence and young adulthood is a particularly intense period of identity formation and that this identity is often done in the context of peer groups (Adams, Gullotta, & Montemayor, 1992). As evidenced in the interviews, these peer groups, or communities of practice, influenced the construction of identity. The various communities of peers in which they participated had great sway in transmitting the guiding values and narratives that participants took on as their own.

Findings suggest that the social spaces (classed, raced and gendered) in which communities of practice were situated influenced the masculine identities practiced. While, as Paechter (2003) argues, these communities were always influenced by dominant social discourse regarding gender, there appeared to be a differential uptake of qualities of hegemonic masculinity and a varied adherence to masculine hierarchies. How communities of practice define themselves, how they are seen by outsiders, the conditions under which they are constituted, and beliefs about what constitutes hegemonic masculinity was salient to the flexibility or the rigidity of masculine values and practices.

Joe, for example, talked about his main group of friends when he attended a wealthy Vancouver high school.

You know, it’s funny because, a lot of us, like, some of us were definitely more nerdy in high school, like myself and a few of the other friends were into a lot of sports, or more into athletics and stuff, and it wasn’t like where that definitely had a lot of classification in high school. It was like, well, who are you, right? For us it was like, well, that’s what I do. (Joe)

Joe perceived that he and the peers that he most often spent time with occupied a loosely defined space in the high school social hierarchy (Pascoe, 2007). He and his buddies
were not, as he pointed out, “super popular” nor were they so low down as to be a target for bullies. They all did fairly well in school, came from “good” homes and were each involved, to some degree, in athletics. Joe reported that the lack of attention focused on his group of friends eased any sort of pressure to achieve some of the markers of successful masculinity that he observed other peers attempting to attain.

Image 6.1 “Back yard BBQ”

We wouldn’t like go out drinking or whatever, like very rarely. Would that happen it was more just focused on hanging out together and doing things, not necessarily what [laughs] guys are doing at that age. Nobody had to be the alpha. Nobody had to prove that he was the man. But that was part of what was great about it, it was a really positive group. (Joe)

Joe took a photo to illustrate the kind of thing that he and his friends would do when they got together. These activities, according to Joe, would include skateboarding and then hanging out together. In the summer they enjoyed BBQ-ing in Joe’s backyard. His views on masculinity reflected this more relaxed adherence to hegemonic masculinity. In response to the photo assignment question regarding images of masculinity, Joe remarked that his peers did not take the trouble to perform strength and stoicism for each other.
Like the one [photo question] about being a man, and ya, I guess I hadn’t really thought about what being a man is. It’s not huge in my, like, in with like my friends and people I’m with there’s not like a huge like distinction where you have to be a man, like a man-man, it’s like those stereotypes aren’t really like—well they’re there. They’re always around, but they aren’t as distinctive. (Joe)

Damien was also untroubled by moving in and out of performing practices consistent with hegemonic masculinity. Following in the tradition of men in his step-father’s family, he was doing a business degree at university. He camped, hiked and participated in inter-mural sports at school. He also involved himself in creative writing and did photography as a hobby. Similar to that of Joe, Damien’s group of friends was composed of typical “jocks,” men primarily focused on achieving success at university and moving on to powerful careers; friends from the residential high school he attended and, in Damien’s words, “laid-back-I’m-not-ready-to-move-out-of-my-parent’s-basement kind of guys.”

I never felt any pressure to, you know, be something I didn’t want to be. Everyone was pretty chill. I left [high school name] to go to [boarding school] ‘cause I just wanted to do that but I still kept my friends there. (Damien)

Communities of practice, for Damien, Joe and other participants who shared qualities of a well-resourced middle-class home, athletic and intellectual opportunity and ability, were more likely to encompass more flexible masculine practices.

Joe’s and Damien’s primary community of practice was characterized by a diverse membership. Their friends were close but Joe and Damien described the ways in which they were also separately involved in other communities based on sports and academics. This is consistent with Paetcher’s (2003) argument that an individual’s involvement in multiple communities of practice creates dynamic gender practices. For example, the masculinity Joe
learned in the context of his basketball team or with his peers in his running group might be different from the gender identity in his home community of practice. These communities may be further differentiated from the masculinity reproduced among his school peer group. This implies that the gender identities transmitted by a community of practice are in constant, if gradual, conversion as they are influenced by the gender relations within the context of adjacent communities.

With a habitus that supported their place in the middle class, participants such as Damien and Joe had less need to prove their masculinity in ways that might potentially compromise their health. Their communities of practice valued performances of masculinity that were not dependent on risk-taking in the form of smoking, drug use and extreme sports. As De Visser et al. (2006) argue, the social capital attained through a social location within a White, heterosexual, economically privileged group provided them with sufficient social validation of their masculinity.

Alternatively, participants who grew up poor, within marginalized neighbourhoods, saw their peer groups as functioning not only as a group to relax and have fun with—such as was the case with Joe’s community—but also as a protective unit. Under “siege” by older boys, gangs and police, some participants conceived of their group of friends as bonded by a common desire to stay safe. Aiden, who grew up in what he referred to as a “rough” neighbourhood, explained his community of practice in the following way:
We were just a tight-knit group of guys who looked out for each other in a tough neighbourhood. There was a lot of fighting and people would get robbed for their starter jacket and their Air Jordan’s. It was all about who’s the biggest, who’s the toughest, who has the most girls and money. I saw a lot of people going to jail. Going to jail and coming back out, it’s kind of like a badge of honour.

His photograph, which was taken in order to represent the brand of masculinity advocated by his friends, was of a piece of graffiti. It reads, “The streets have hardened you boy.”

Along with illustrating the robust masculine hierarchies present in the community, Aiden’s quote is also illustrative of other performances of dominant masculinities. To be in the possession of Air Jordan’s and a starter jacket was potentially indicative of wealth and athletic prowess. As the basketball courts were a central space of masculine performance in Aiden’s neighbourhood, to be seen with these items secured one’s place on the masculine hierarchy. A starter jacket was cultural capital in a neighbourhood that considered going to jail a “badge of honour.” Popularized by Hip Hop artists in the 1990s and featured in the film *Boyz n the Hood* (Singleton, 1991), a starter jacket symbolized a rebellion against authority.

In poor neighbourhoods these commodities held even more significance than they might in
wealthier ones where they would be commonplace. Because it would be rare for parents to be able to purchase expensive sportswear, they often represented hours and hours of minimum wage at a part-time job.

Having the “most girls” is indicative of the gender relations practiced within this community. The possession of girls in one’s group or a cache of girlfriends functions as proof of one’s heterosexuality as well as one’s physical attractiveness.

6.3 Neighbourhood

The way that participants understood their peer group to be evaluated by adults their neighbourhoods also appeared to play a role in how participants constructed their masculine identity. In contrast to the ways that young men such as Damien, Joe and Jayden perceived themselves as important and productive members of society, participants growing up in poorer neighbourhoods saw themselves as homogenized and pathologised by authorities. Rather than viewing police or school staff as resources for them, for example, participants thought of them to be in opposition, perpetually waiting to catch them in the act of doing something illegal.

Participants, including Aiden, talked about the way that adolescent experiences left them with the sense that it would be difficult to escape the label of “bad kid” that was conferred on them by the authorities—whether deserved or not. “They (the police) just look at you and assume the worse no matter if you are a straight A student or some thug.”

Aiden and his friends perceived such negativity from authoritarian adults in the community that they saw little purpose attempting to gain approval from abiding by rules. Even though it was Aiden’s perception that he was in one of the less destructive groups of
teenagers in the neighbourhood, he spoke of perpetually being in trouble. “We smoked a lot of pot when we were young. House parties would get broken up and we’d end up drinking in the park. And then we’d get chased out of the park.”

In a similar way, Jason spoke about the image of young men as outsiders or a negative force in the community. “I guess we were like a stereotype, you know. Just bad kids doing what bad kids do. Drinking, smoking, making a mess and trying not to get caught doing it.”

Being viewed negatively by authorities seemed to facilitate masculine performances of defiance against what they perceived to be mainstream\(^6\) conventions regarding health and safety. These performances of powerful masculinity included activities such as smoking, drinking, drug use and violence. Masculine performances were also characterized by demonstrations of hostility for those they considered nonmembers. While the identities of all communities of practice are informed, at least in part, by the “othering” of outsiders (Paechter, 1998; Paechter, 2003), participants in these communities of practice spoke at greater length, and in stronger language, about the need to demonstrate dominance over other groups through displays of masculine strength and intimidation.

[Name of school] Secondary is, when I went there, it was one of those schools where you could tell the social difference between people, like who had more money than you and the preppy kids hung out with the preppy kids and me being one of the only Black kids there and him being Black as well it was like there wasn’t enough of us to not like each so we all kind of had to get along. It was kind of us against the world, if you can understand that. The cops were always on the lookout for us and it was

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\(^6\) With the acknowledgement that there is no one mainstream, I refer here to dominant society and the discourse emerging from dominant social and cultural institutions.
pretty much the same with some groups of other kids. When I look back on it, it was
a bit of a mean life out there in [name of town]. We spent a lot of time beating or
getting beat. (Nathan)

Jose described his former community of practice, street-involved individuals who
engaged in regular drug use, as exemplifying the attributes of a group clearly residing outside
the mainstream. Growing up as the son of a sex-trade worker, he experienced pimps, johns
and dealers coming in and out of whichever hotel room he and his mother were living in at
the time, at all hours of the night. At the age of 11, he left his mother to live on the streets.
Jose quickly turned to drugs and alcohol as a means to survive. He recalled waking up every
day with the first thing on his mind, “Okay, who am I going to fuck over today for some
cash?” Jose talked about his life as a cycle of doing drugs and breaking the law to get more
drugs, hanging out in crack shacks and “sleeping on dirty-ass floors in people’s kitchens and
shit.”

By the time Jose was fourteen, he was known to police.

Interviewer: What did you spend time in jail for?

Jose: A couple of things, actually. I went to jail for assault. That one was
just because I ran into one of my friends and her boyfriend was
beating the crap out of her so I went and did the same thing to him.
I’ve been picked up a couple of times for possession.

Interviewer: Just little stuff.

Jose: Yeah, nothing too criminal like trafficking or something like that.

Interviewer: No?
Jose: No, not quite, just little things that would usually come to be with an addict on the streets. Nothing too extreme but nothing too great either.

There were several instances where Jose used violence to get out of tough situations. “You could never show weakness or let on that you would hesitate to kill someone if they stepped on your toes, or you would be the dead man.” This public performance of masculinity on the street was one of toughness, resilience and strength, simultaneously situating women as subordinate to men and in need of protection (Messerschmidt, 1993b). His reference to coming to the defence of his female friend by overpowering the man who was beating her up, is another gendered performance pointing to both to his strength and chivalry.

Jose himself was the target of violence when a rumour spread that he was a narc [a narcotics agent or informant].

One of the people I used to hang out with got really fucked in a crack shack and started telling people that I was an undercover cop and I was like 15 at the time. I didn’t look like a cop, I was too young to be a cop, I didn’t talk like a cop and I did way too many drugs to be undercover, so that didn’t make any sense to me. Things just started to get really weird, the person that I was staying with and stuff, I came home and I got jumped by like five people. I go to my other friend’s place and he comes at me with a 2 x 4 and like all of these people are mad at me. (Jose)

As Jose maintained, deviating from valued community practices and situating one’s self outside of the community can have deadly repercussions. Even in this story he is simultaneously speaking of the danger of the street and his own ability to get himself out of a dangerous situation relatively unscathed. He is enacting a performance of stoicism (after being beat up) and clear-headedness.
The masculine performances engaged in during the situations of danger that Aiden and Jose describe point to the confluence of context and hegemonic masculinities. The performances of masculinity are both an adherence to norms of practice within their community and, while emerging as a response to their place of social exclusion, within their larger community.

The most dramatic and regular performances of risk-taking occurred within communities of practice in which there was a rigidity in the production of masculine performances. Communities of practice that persistently reproduced performances of masculinities that endanger the health of the individual and the wider population were differentiated from communities of practice that included a more diverse set of masculine practices. Communities of practice that reproduce rigid masculinities tended to be an individual’s dominant community of practice, overriding the practices and values of other practice communities. The “under siege” community of practice mentioned by Aiden, or the extremely marginalized community of practice described by Jose, tended not to draw from the so-called health-bestowing masculinities in the peer group descriptions of others.

This form of practice community was not limited, however, to those who were economically marginalized. Four friends of a young man who had died in a motorcycle crash volunteered to be part of the study. They, too, depicted the masculinity of their peer-based community of practice as static, rigid and negative. This group of participants spent their adolescence as self-proclaimed “bad kids” for whom a successful masculine performance was achieved by being surrounded by attractive women, engaging in and winning fights,

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7 While gender identities are multiple and unstable, rigidity indicates that there are fewer practices to choose from in the constitution of masculinity.
achieving wealth and having a tough reputation. The four young men—Micah, Shawn, Amir and Ben—by their own description, were concerned with their own fun and little else.

The group of friends had a disregard for school rules—an institution generally valued by their middle-class parents. Micah took a picture representing one of the more minor infractions that earned him and his friends a suspension from high school. “On snow days, there was a big crew of people here, and some of the bad kids, or whatever you want to call us, would throw snowballs down at cars. Bad news right?”

Image 6.4 “School View”

While Micah and his friends knew that throwing snowballs at moving cars was dangerous and outlawed by the school administration, it was of the utmost importance for their own reputation to be seen as unafraid of the consequences. A valued masculine practice in their community of practice was to be seen as confronting authority and this implied displaying no concern about suspension, grades and other markers of educational achievement. The peer group took pride in their disengagement from parental authority and embodiment of the “negative role model” label assigned by their schoolteachers. Because they were determined to maintain an identity, in some ways school-sanctioned punishments
inadvertently provided additional opportunities for producing particular risky masculine
practices.

It was like basically in a sense we didn’t care about what teachers and vice principals
thought about us and we didn’t think they were going to follow through on anything
too much. It was like we were the kings of the school by the time we were in grade
11. We even had our bad ass own smoking pit. We were more delinquent than the
delinquents. (Shawn)

Image 6.5 “Smoke Buddies”

6.4 Communities of Practice and the Masculine Purpose of Risk-Taking

As evidenced in the previous section, risk-taking as a production of masculinity does
not have a unitary meaning. The risk activities that are engaged within divergent social
spaces are different practices that carry varied significance. While there were marked
variations in the ways that participants who came from wealthy versus marginalized
neighbourhoods described their communities of practice, data gathered in this study did not
provide the basis for the construction of simple relationships between material wealth,
masculinity and risk-taking. Often it was the social relations within a specific community of
practice that were most influential in the extent to which participants chose to engage in risk-
taking.
Those participants, for example, who involved themselves in adventure sports, “did risk” (Connell, 1995; Laurendeau, 2008) as a way of both forming an individual identity and as adhering to the communal practices within the social space. Michael described the way that the gendered social relations within the community of backcountry skiers guided practice.

You are with these guys and you’ve all taken on the same mountains together. So you are like bonded and… and it’s like you want to show them… you don’t want to be lame by backing down when your buddy has already gone down. There’s a fair bit of showing off, I’d have to say. If I were being honest, you know.

In his talk about the bonding that occurs by engaging in the sport, Michael is confirming his acceptance of community values and practices and thereby solidifying his central membership in the group. It is clear, through Michael’s depiction of a person who “backs down” as “lame”, that there are practices one must take on in order to maintain one’s position in the group. He also indicates that there is a certain amount of posturing that occurs in the course of these activities. While men are part of a group that performs backcountry skiing as a unit, there is an underlying drive to distinguish oneself as slightly more skilled or brave.

The social relations within communities of practice and the ensuing performances of masculinity also are greatly influenced by the social relations occurring in the wider context in which they are situated. The mountain resort close to the city, at which a number of participants engaged in outdoor activities, is populated with a multitude of young people who involve themselves in varied adventure sports. The communities that cluster in the vicinity of the resort town and local mountains are part of a particular environment with a milieu that
has been branded by those involved in the commercial interests of such “sportscapes” (Beal & Wilson, 2004; Wheaton, 2004). There is a celebration of risk and a defiant orientation towards safety precautions. Through “showing off”, as Michael suggested, young men signal to each other that they are accepted and deserving members of this adventuring community of practice.

Ethan’s masculine performance of toughness might also be viewed as posturing, but in a community with different social relations. For example, Ethan grew up in a violent neighbourhood with little adult support or supervision. His father left the family when Ethan was a small child, leaving his mother to financially support the family as a single parent. Despite the long hours that his mother worked, the family was often short of food and other material necessities. As a young person, Ethan recalls spending much time wandering the streets trying to avoid trouble. Instead of being a place of refuge, Ethan experienced school to be another venue where he felt unsafe.

The social relations within Ethan’s larger community were heavily influenced by racism. As two of the few Aboriginal students in the high school, Ethan and his friend were often the targets of racism. When asked if he considered himself to be a risk-taker he laughed and said that yes he was but not by choice. Ethan and his friend were often called upon to demonstrate their strength and ability to defend themselves.
I remember a lot of times where we would have to fight or be called to the outside to fight. There were probably like ten people against us two. We’d either win or we’d lose and get our ass beat. Sometimes P. would have a car so we’d drive like shit out of there. (Ethan)

Theoretically, Ethan and his friend did not have to fight; they could have walked away. Ethan made clear, however, that his location within interlocking oppressions of poverty and racism implied that fighting and winning provided one of his limited opportunities to achieve cultural capital in his neighbourhood. In addition, the reputation provided by a performance of a hardened masculinity provided some level of protection for them on the streets. As is the case for many young people in their neighbourhood, working parents had little time to provide supervision and they were left to their own devices on the same streets that drug dealers, gangs and sex-trade workers occupied. In this sense, fighting was an act of risk management rather than a demonstration of risk tolerance.

The difference between the risk-taking practices of the mountain thrill-seekers and groups of young men making their way on urban streets is the more apparent element of choice in communities situated in privilege, compared to those located as marginalized. The voluntary risks that upper/middle-class thrill-seekers engage in afford social and cultural capital, elevating them to a more central position in their community of practice. For participants such as Daniel, Damien and Brett, to refuse to engage in accepted risk practices of the community may be damaging to their identity as a group member or hurt a masculine reputation, but it would be unlikely to result in injury or death in the same way that it might to Levi, Stephen and Marty.
While situated in different fields, the shared purpose of risk-taking between these two communities is a logic of practice (Crawshaw, 2004). Community risk-taking is an essential part of constituting a masculine identity within their peer group.

6.5 Memorial Acts

Thus far, I have discussed two basic orientations of gendered communities of practice. There are communities that lean toward more flexible performances of masculinity—individuals who seem to have multiple masculine identities (Connell, 1995) available to them—and those who persistently perform a similar masculinity across a variety of contexts. Without dismissing the well-documented phenomenon that as men age they take fewer physical risks than young men (Kimmel, 2008) risk-taking is a remarkably stable set of practices. Through answering the research question “How do men shift their risk-taking and health practices after the accidental death of a male peer” this section describes the way that the experience of losing a friend triggered a shift in masculine risk practices, both inside and outside of communities of practice.

Responses surrounding the question “How did you honour your friend?” produced data indicating that participants felt changed by the experience of losing a friend. Some participants chose to memorialize their friend by literally marking their body. The tattoo read “no regrets.” Damien wanted to remember his cousin and his motto of “opening yourself up to new experiences and not looking back” by getting a tattoo.
Image 6.6 “No Regrets Tattoo”

I got that tattoo down my arm, just over a year after it happened; my sister and I got tattoos together. She got a tattoo on her leg and I got that on my arm. We waited for a while just to make sure because a lot of my buddies did get tattoos and a lot of them I didn’t like, and I didn’t want to rush into it. I wanted to think about it and make sure that it was a piece of art that you want on your body for the rest of your life. So I took my time with that and I’m really happy that I did, and I’m really happy with the way that it turned out. These bands were made for Q. and they say “No Regrets” on them and then Q.K. and basketballs there. I pretty much wear this everyday and still try to live by that slogan. (Damien)

Image 6.7 “No Regrets Bracelet”

Damien described the thoughtfulness involved in the choice to get a tattoo. He talks about his decision to get a tattoo as considered in a rational (masculine) rather than an emotional way.

Micah spoke about getting a bracelet made as a memorial artefact.
Shawn was best friends with him, he got a bracelet made and it has his name on the back. Obviously it has the years, 1990 to 2007 or whatever, but I just did, I just get the same thing too because people were getting tattoos and I wasn’t really down to make that commitment about something when I was in an emotional state like that so I’m really glad I picked this, I mean it is so versatile, I’m used to it, it’s something I wear every single, literally every day. It comes off when I shower and it goes right back on, it stays on for everything else. This is going to stay with me; this is something I can take with me. (Micah)

Like Damien, Micah highlights the fact that getting a memorial tattoo could be construed as an emotional act. While Damien is careful to convey that much thought (as opposed to feeling) went into getting the tattoo, Micah makes the point that he avoided making an emotional commitment altogether by getting a bracelet. These participants describe the act of creating a symbol of enduring connection to their lost friend and yet convey it in a manner that was striking in its disconnection.

Jose memorialized his friend by carving letters signifying “Rest in Peace” on a tree
Jose did not have the money available to him, at the time of his friend’s death, to purchase a bracelet engraved with his friend’s name, nor could he get a tattoo. Instead he chose a different kind of memorial—that of carving his friend’s name in a tree. Having a memorial place was also important to Jose because he did not know if there was a grave. Unlike almost every other participant who could visit a cemetery, Jose’s friend’s death was not associated with a specific site at which to grieve.

Regardless of the form that the memorial artefact took, the creation of these bore testimony to the desire that each participant felt to have something concrete by which to remember his friend. As Jason, who keeps a photo of his friend on his bedroom wall, explained: “his picture is still up, he is still here. You don’t just drift away and that’s it, you are around still.”

6.6 A Shift in Practice

All participants were affected by the death of their friend but reported differently the degree to which they actually made changes in their practices or shifted their expression of masculine identity. While Damien, for example, was deeply shaken by the death of his
friend, he did not see the death as fundamentally shifting his orientation towards risk behaviours. When I inquired specifically into this issue, he mentioned safer driving practices.

    On a micro sense, I still get sketched out with yellow lights at a traffic light when I am driving. My buddies are like, “just go man” but I stop right away, like at a left turn and that kind of thing. (Damien)

    More important for Damien was to not succumb to fear and to live out the slogan on his tattoo, which represented taking the psychological and physical risk of striking out into the unknown. An additional photo he took for the question “How do you honour your friend?” is of him on a climbing expedition, unshaven and free of the constraints of city living.

    I had no idea what I was doing. I knew that I loved the outdoors and a really good friend of mine did it and he recommended it, and I just wanted to just be up there and experience that kind of stuff. So it was kind of an ongoing thing, just doing that kind of thing. (Damien)

    Damien is able to preserve his dominant masculine identity through both the photo and its description. There is a performance of a rugged adventurer who deals with feelings through accomplishing a tough athletic task. In contrast to other photos that Damien had
taken of himself, which portray him as smooth and clean cut, this photo shows him wind-blown and rough-edged. He is fearlessly embracing a new activity and a new side to himself.

When asked if he thought differently about engaging in risky activities following the death of his friend in a bike accident, Chris responded that, for a time, he and his friends adjusted their orientation towards the thrill-seeking activities they were involved in.

We were all kind of struck with this as some sort of calamity that made us rethink doing stupid activities for a while. I think people in general became more melancholy in their activities. We would definitely cut out from these spontaneous, ridiculously dangerous activities that we would partake in at some point. (Chris)

After a short while, however, the fear inspired by their friend’s death faded and Chris and his peer group reintegrated these activities into their lives. “Yes, we are mortal. This doesn’t mean you should stop living.”

For other participants, the death triggered a more profound self-awareness and critique. Repeatedly, these young men articulated the question, “What do I want to be remembered for?” These participants spoke about the death of their friend as mediating a transformation in their expression of identity. Ethan spoke of being initially drawn to his friend because of the many positive qualities he saw in him. A short while after his friend’s death he came to the understanding that these attributes alone did not constitute a life well lived. His friend’s various dependencies came to define his day-to-day life and overshadowed many of the things that he could offer to the world.

I had a moment of realization, like I was saying, [about] how I want to be remembered and what I want to be remembered for. Regardless of all of the stuff he was going through, everyone loved and cared about him. He was a good guy and
very sociable and I wanted to be him but with the balance. I wanted to be that guy, but without the other stuff that came with it. (Ethan)

Jim had a similar reflection about the deaths of two of his close friends.

It definitely makes me think about how these people live their lives and the fact that they died so young, how I can prevent that, how I can live my life to honour these guys, how can I learn from their deaths because they both were, it’s an awful thing to say but it was basically both of their faults. They were alcohol-related incidents that could have been avoided. So I guess it has me thinking about the world a little bit more. I sure want to be remembered in a different way. (Jim)

For some participants, a reflection on what they wanted to be remembered for resulted in a re-evaluation of doing risk activities as a means of performing masculinity. Communities of practice were important in the process of reflection and transformation. Because of the powerful ways in which gender values and practices are transmitted within communities, participants found that they either had to leave or reconfigure their primary communities of practice in order to change their own masculine norms, In the following two sections I will give examples of two significant markers of change—the transformation of a community of practice that maintains its membership, and the act of leaving a community of practice that has preserved its rigidity.

6.7 Transforming a Community of Practice From Within

The first scenario, a description of a community of practice that reconstituted a collective masculine identity following the tragedy, returns to the data from interviews with the four friends of a young man who died in a motorcycle crash. Micah, Shawn, Ben and Amir described how they grew up together after meeting in elementary school and continuing on into high school. They forged a strong bond and a group identity they proudly
named the “famous five.” Self-proclaimed “bad ass” guys in their senior years of high school, it was all about being “the man” and embodying a strong, aggressive, collective masculine identity.

On a rainy June evening prior to graduating from high school, E., one of the famous five, attended a party where he enjoyed a few drinks. Dominating the discussion that night was talk of E.’s motorcycle, which he had saved for and recently purchased. A little after midnight, E. left the party and got on the motorcycle. Micah described what happened next that evening.

Okay, so he was flying down and from the skid marks it looked like he had slipped and went head first into this pole and his bike got demolished into pieces. He flew over into these bushes. Somebody called it in that the pole was down so they didn’t actually know anybody was there. Then they get there and I guess they started to figure out that an accident had happened. They didn’t actually know he was in there for awhile and then they kind of figured it out because someone was in the bush there. I guess they figured out that there was a sock hanging somewhere, somebody saw his foot sticking out and then that is when they finally realized that someone was there, so they had to call in the ambulance and stuff. (Micah)
Four close friends experienced the death of one of their own and this experience brought them close together.

We have a pretty tight-knit group of friends, I mean as many of us as there are. It was kind of like a group experience. Everyone had their own way to deal with it, but everyone kind of—it was all open, it was a group experience. We would talk and share memories and stuff like that. (Shawn)

The boys were deeply shaken by E.’s death. In a period of time when emotions ran high, Ben described a moment of clarity. He said that he felt sad but that the death affected him in a different way.

[It] angered me, not for the fact that he passed away, but for the fact of how it happened. It’s one thing to pass away on a motorcycle, but it’s another thing if there is a different conclusion, different factors and variables playing into it, right? It’s selfish. (Ben)

In this case, Ben’s anger acted as a counterpoint to his sadness. While, in some cases, anger is construed as a loss of control, in this situation it served to temper his grief. Ben could not feel completely sad because his anger, in the form of the rational judgement that E. was at fault for his own death, kept it in check. Anger, in fact, contributed to Ben’s ability to face the death with stoicism. This stoicism, however, did not move Ben to dismiss the experience as the foolish act of another, but instead brought him to a place of reflection on his own life. For the first time he began to understand that behaviours, particularly thoughtless or careless behaviours, had lasting influence on the lives of others.

Similarly, Amir realized that his desire to engage in a risky activity needed to be weighed against the potential for inflicting pain on others. This was illustrated through his description of E.’s mother who gathered the four surviving young men together on a regular
basis to talk and grieve. As the relationship between the friends and the mother deepened, Amir felt a responsibility to her:

As much as I like bikes and things with engines and go-carts and stuff like that, I don’t know. I have always wanted to have bikes and I’ve always wanted to ride one, but it’s just one of those things. If his mom saw me on it, it’s not really fair because she cares about us too, and I know that she does. When her own son dies from something like that, it’s not something you should really be doing, around her especially. (Amir)

Just as Jose took up the masculine performance of protecting women, Amir acts to shelter E.’s mother. This protection was not done out of a sense of ownership, that might signify a hierarchical relationship between a male and female, but out of a sense of moral duty. This sense of responsibility extended beyond E.’s mother to relationships with others, and a different attitude to life.

Shawn remembered his girlfriend’s mother telling him, “Instead of living for one person, now you are living for two, so you better make damn sure that you make good decisions.” Despite the three years that have passed since E.’s death, Shawn remembers that as being a powerful turning point for him. He vowed to carry this new consciousness on through everything he did in the next part of his life.

In the wake of tragedy, the previously rigid performances of masculinity that presented health risks to the young men and those around them were expanded to encompass a plurality of gender expressions and performances. The experience of grieving and seeking support from others around them allowed for the new ideas, values and information to be infused into their lifestyles and world view.
E.’s unexpected death had forced the four friends to reconstitute their collective masculine identity under the influence of adjacent, yet evermore relevant practice communities (Connell, 1995; Paechter, 2003). It was apparent there was a shift, not only in the gendered identity practiced in the community, but its gender relations. The act of taking care of themselves was taken up by these participants to protect significant others (in this case E.’s mother). In addition, the boys reconfigured their relationships with women, revealing closer relationships with their mothers and the replacement of “one-night-stands” with long-term girlfriends. In essence, the boys’ masculinities and health were increasingly contextualized within not just one but several communities of practice.

These participants would be quick to say that they have not turned into, as Micah says, “monastic saints.” While still having the kind of fun they had previously enjoyed together, the young men are less reckless and hedonistic, and instead they are mindful in the way that one is when thinking of another. As Ben stated, “I used to drink and drive quite a bit, but I stopped now, obviously.”

6.8 Risk and Responsibility

Donnelly (2004) argues that the relationship between risk and responsibility is deeply gendered. While women are chastised for abandoning the role of mother, daughter and wife when they undertake risk activities, it is not generally asked of young men—particularly White, middle-class men—to think of others when risking life and limb (Donnelly, 2004). When life circumstances change, men draw on different narratives of masculinity. Robertson (2006) notes that men can draw on a variety of arrangements of gendered practice when constructing their own gendered identity. Alex, a young father, lived a risk-filled life as an
adolescent and early teen. He was deeply into drugs and often drove while intoxicated. Having a child changed all that for him.

A big shift took place where I just looked at my life a little differently, because I was careless for quite a while and thinking in terms of myself, like if anything was to happen to me, then so be it, it happens to me, right? Which is selfish and, you know, ignorant, to look at things like that. But at the same time, ‘cause there’s always people that care about you but that don’t want to see you know. Just because you’re OK with whatever happening doesn’t mean that everyone else is as well, right? When my daughter was born and I saw her for the first time, I mean, I was there when she was born and right away there’s something that kind of shifts, or now you’re kind of, I’m living for her too, right? Not just myself. Like I have a responsibility towards her to not be doing carelessly stupid things and to not be just nonchalant, you know, whether something happens to me, oh well, you know? (Alex)

While none of the other participants had the experience of fathering a child, losing a friend had a remarkably similar influence on young men’s construction of masculinity. The risk-taker who was previously responsible for no one (the hegemonic narrative of the Adventurer) has now constructed an identity formed by the responsible narrative of the provider, or what I have identified as the “Father Figure.” While there are often gender relations between men and women involved in this shift, it is a largely symbolic change in which hedonistic versions of identity are trumped by a responsibility that participants care for.
6.9 Leaving a Community of Practice

Another set of participants did not experience a reconfiguration of community following the loss of their friend. For these young men the death of their friend created a rupture in their masculine identity and practices, but this same disruption did not occur in the lives of their group of peers. For these participants there was such cognitive dissonance between their new understandings and beliefs and those values transmitted within their practice community that it was not viable to remain in this peer group.

Jose’s friend, for example, was part of his community of practice and yet he was, in some ways, very different. Unlike the rest of his peers, Jose felt as though he and his friend shared something that went beyond smoking crack together. He states:

Well, it was a large group of people, but when we hung out it was usually just me and him. Everybody that we hung out with at the time was really drug oriented and stuff, and when we hung out it wasn’t, ‘Oh I got some rock, you got some rock, let’s hang out.’ It was, ‘Let’s hang out.’ (Jose)

Jose felt seen and understood by this friend, and when he passed away as a result of a drug overdose, it became evident that the dominant values and identity reproduced within his community of practice no longer resonated with Jose’s perspective.
Jose: Yeah. It took me a long time before I got up [and] became a person again.

Interviewer: How long did it take?

Jose: Well, it took two and a half months before I started leaving my house again. Like I said, out of everyone that I hung out with at the time, he was the only person that was a real person, so when I decided to leave, I had to start over. I had to find a new area, I had to find new friends and I had to start completely over.

Starting over, for Jose, meant that he found a girlfriend who was “clean.” His involvement with her was a demonstration of his commitment to a new lifestyle.

Ethan, whose friend died following a drug overdose after years of dependency on heroin and cocaine, also had the experience of being dramatically changed. Shortly following the death he left his dominant community of practice of street-involved young people to, in his words “start over.”

Yeah, I left everybody behind. The last two years have been pretty freakin’ lonely except for the couple of times that I have gone out for drinks. My circle of friends has definitely changed. I don’t go out anymore, I don’t party, I’m not part of that scene anymore. All of my friends are people, associates of party friends I guess. I realize that they aren’t really friends, just a type of misery-enjoys-company type of thing. I’ve left a lot of those people behind, even my girlfriend. It’s just like, you know what, I can’t deal with this life anymore. (Ethan)

While Ethan’s former community had no direct hand in the death of his friends, the values and practices it embodied, Ethan felt, put him on a negative path.

Unlike Jose, who iteratively became associated with different communities, Ethan wanted to ensure that his next community of practice would transmit a radically different identity than that of this previous one. Returning to the religious roots of his early childhood,
he sought out and joined an organized church group. With the goal of gaining entrance to a bible college located in outside the city, Ethan went to an adult education centre to complete the credits required for high school graduation.

6.10 Grief and Liminality

While there were a diverse accounts of why participants chose to leave or remain within a community of practice, a primary dynamic seemed to be whether or not the community entered into a period of liminality (Turner, 1977) together. According to Turner (1977) a period of grieving can be “liminal” because it represents an interruption in the ordered universe where there are new possibilities. Grief can act as a liminal occasion when an individual becomes cognizant of his or her place in the emotional, spiritual and social world and reinterprets the overarching pattern of social relations that defines social structure. In liminal spaces a person stands outside of his or her normal social role and embraces alternative social arrangements and values. Liminality then is a transitional state between two phases—individuals are “betwixt and between”: they do not belong to the society that they previously were a part of and they have not been reincorporated into another ordered society (Turner, 1977). Scholars who have explored the space of grief as liminal offer the idea that it can mediate the transformation of identity (Gentry, Kennedy, Paul, & Hill, 1995; Jones, Zagacki, & Lewis, 2007; Ritchie, 2003).

For individuals who left their community of practice, their experience of liminality was solitary. The death experience was not directly processed as a group, consistent with hegemonic notions that discourage men’s communal reflexivity in an emotional event. Participants, in turn, felt alienated or as if they no longer belonged to this community of practice. In contrast, those that had a transformation of a previously rigid practice
community, experienced “communitas,”—the bonds of intimacy that develop in groups of people that are experiencing liminality together (Turner, 1977).

6.11 “Man up”: A Shift in Gender Identity

For many participants the alteration in masculine identity construction was implied, rather than directly articulated. In the statements regarding their movement away from hedonism towards accountability, from individualism towards a sense of the collective, participants described their re-inscribed gender identity. Other participants were more cognizant about the implications of tragedy to their own gender construction. This was revealed in their answers to the question, “What does it mean to ‘man up’?” Instead of interpreting this as an accusation, these participants saw the process of grief as triggering in them an impulse to “man up” or become a grownup who takes responsibility for his own actions. For them it implied finding a balance between being a strong individual and being someone that others could rely on.

As Aiden stated:

What does it mean to man up? The ability to look yourself in the mirror every day and realize, at the end of the day, that you’re the only one who really can change your life. Everyone needs help sometimes. At the end of the day, the only one that you should really count on is yourself. Manning up doesn’t mean punching someone in the face, but taking the steps to take control of your life. Everyone should have a support circle but it still comes down to you. Being true to yourself. (Aiden)
Within this short statement Aiden points to a number of masculine virtues including self-reliance, autonomy, control and individualism. However, as depicted in the photo below, Aiden is also invoking certain vulnerability. Despite the stern look that he is giving the camera, he is not performing a dominant masculinity in the photo. He is in the bathroom, situated beside a haphazardly hung hand towel. His physique is not muscular nor is his expression one of confidence. He is, as Hearn (1992) makes reference to, caught in a moment of private masculinity that challenges public notions. What makes this photo particularly poignant is that he is photographing himself in this moment. The vulnerability is not inadvertently captured but intentionally performed—underlining the idea that to “man up” implies having the wherewithal to embrace both strength and vulnerability.

Shawn invoked an archetype of masculinity:

It’s like to be a man you have to have your own, I don’t want to say your own thing, but it’s certain individuality, and you have your own moral beliefs and you have to stick by them, and it’s almost like being firm. It’s hard to explain, I’m not saying that I’m a man yet, of course, because I’m only 19, but that is what you strive to. You see men that are great men throughout history, and even today, it’s like they aren’t there because they are macho and have hair on their chest and on their chin, that’s not what it’s about. It’s about things that they have accomplished and things that they have—
accomplishment is one of them as well, and success, and being able to take care of your own shit and your family, and take care of your friends and be there when you have to be there. (Shawn)

Here is found a different set of traditionally masculine virtues, Shawn desires success and accomplishment in order to take care of family and friends, thus displaying loyalty towards those close to him. This can be contrasted to a masculine orientation toward accumulating material goods in order to achieve an outward appearance of coolness.

Levi had this response to the question “What does it mean to man up?”

Just making your own way. My values have definitely changed. Before it used to be, you know, being the toughest guy and owning a car and stuff like that, materialistic things, getting lots of girls. Now it is just being well liked and being someone who is there for people, reliable. It has definitely changed a lot. (Levi)

Other participants answered similarly, stating that to be a mature man meant putting aside sexist attitudes and irresponsible behaviour, and casting their lot with those who understand the implications of their actions.

Sloan, Gough and Conner (2009) argue that hegemonic masculinity has been traditionally under-nuanced. Gendered identities can incorporate aspects of traditional masculinity that contribute to the health and well-being of themselves and those around them without taking on the entire constellation of attributes.

6.11 Conclusion

Communities are powerful mechanisms in the production and reproduction of gendered identity and gender relations. This chapter began by discussing the ways the communities of practice, in their various incarnations within habitus and social spaces, are
salient in conveying notions of risk-taking. It was significant that, in a liminal time of grief, individuals referenced the ways in which communities were able or incapable of accommodating shifts in gender identity and accompanying orientations towards risk behaviours. Communities that were able to revise existing values and practices with an occurrence of a transformative event seemed to move towards supporting members in embodying healthier versions of masculinity. When communities in which participants held membership were unable to shift practices, members were moved to make life changes through the rejection of these communities.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Empirical Summary

Young men dealing with the death of a friend do so in social and cultural fields in which they are burdened by a hegemonic masculinity that promotes a stoic and invulnerable response to pain. They labour under the narrow expectations of White, western society that they react to a tragedy in a way that is either stoically unaffected or by way of angry explosions against the persons or institutions deemed responsible for the death. In this time—when they described feeling broken, lonely and confused—young men in this study stated that they were apt to adopt dissociative and instrumental grief practices rather than to reach out for support or engage with softer feelings and expressions of sadness. Many experienced intense discomfort and unwelcome vulnerability in this state of grief. This dis-ease caused men to attempt to explain away feelings, underscore non-feminine responses (“my tear ducts just don’t work”), speak about how women are more “evolved” and justify hyper-masculine reactions to grief.

Likewise, the processes by which participants worked through their emotions exemplified the influence of hegemonic masculinity on grief practices. With the exception of the few participants who described alternate, non-hegemonic activities that they employed to work through grief (painting, drawing and creative writing), participants aligned their grief experience with a masculinity defined by instrumentality and numbing of pain (sports, retreat and substance use). The hegemonic masculinity of grief was underscored by the photographs that participants took with their hard and stark qualities, consistently picturing brick and cement. Participants’ discourse of grief, illustrated in their photographs, was not soft and relenting but dark and unyielding, adhering to a dominant masculinity of power and strength.
As previous research asserts, there are serious health risks to men that persist with men’s adherence to hegemonic versions of masculinity (Courtenay, 2000, 2009). For many participants in this study, the first stages of dealing with grief were spent suppressing their sadness through drinking to get drunk and the use of drugs. While this might have functioned to manage pain, substance overuse implies elevated risk of injury and death in the short term and damage to the body in the longer term. While engaging in exercise to deal with grief has positive physical and psychological outcomes, over-exercise to avoid painful emotion done to create a masculine physique has harmful consequences (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000). Anger, employed as a masculine grief practice, can also present health risks to both men themselves and to those around them. Angry violence or other external expressions of rage, such as driving too fast or destruction of property, can injure and kill.

As argued throughout this dissertation, the notion that hegemonic masculinity is uniformly negative and harmful to health and well-being does not hold up when set against empirical data. What is required is a nuanced understanding of masculinities and grief practices (Robertson, 2006; Schofield. et al., 2000). Alongside the negative outcomes of participants’ bids to perform grief practices that are congruent with hegemonic masculinities, there are positive ones. Participants’ powerful responses to the loss caused them to enter into an emotional realm that they had never before explored and to reflect on mortality in a way that they had not done previously. While descriptions of self remained largely hegemonic, they were reflective of a different realm of masculinity. Participants described taking on the role of protector or of a staunchly loyal masculinity that led them to be less apt to put themselves or others in danger. Their newly constructed gender identity gave them cause to engage in thoughtful, considered reflection on whether or not to drink and drive or to head
out into the back country following an avalanche warning. All of the shifts in attitudes and points of view can, while still under the umbrella of hegemonic masculinity, be interpreted as positive for both the health of young men and the people around them.

### 7.2 Methodological Contributions

This study lends support for the use of arts-informed methods for data collection in qualitative research with young men. While not an easy task for all the participants, the process by which the men went about reflecting on a question in order to produce an image provided an elixir for conversation and diminished the possibility for an easy or pat answer to a question. While photos are no more “truthful” than interview data, they allow for rich interpretation on the part of both the participant and the researcher. There were three primary areas in which using photo elicitation aided in the collection of rich data.

The production of photographs on “What does it mean to be a man?” facilitated a discussion of masculinity that went beyond typical, socially informed interpretations of masculinity and proved to be a way of side-stepping hegemony. For example, a few participants commented that the pressure they felt to produce one image of what it meant to be a man (though it was not an instruction to produce just one photo!) made them realize that they had more than one idea about masculinity. They were able to become cognizant of the way that their masculine identity was plural.

The photo assignment question “How did you feel after your friend died?” allowed for a broad interpretation of grief. Rather than demanding that the participant access feeling words that might have felt threatening to their masculine identity, it provided an opportunity for participants to find metaphors for their grief that lent themselves to concrete description.
Given the number of participants who produced an array of photographs that were produced in answer to this question, I can assume that this aspect of the study had a therapeutic quality to it.

The photo assignment questions regarding the places that participants occupied and the shared practices that they engaged in facilitated my understanding of the Bourdieusian concept of field. This enabled me to conceptualize the ways in which the shared contexts of participants, as well as the material and discursive spaces they passed through, influenced their grief practices.

Finally, interview data revealed that participants often involved themselves in more than one art form. Some participants wrote rap songs; others poetry; while others painted, drew or did graffiti as an art form. Researchers seeking to collect qualitative data from this population should consider taking up a variety visual methods in order to augment interview data.

7.3 Theoretical Contributions

The findings summarized in the first section of this chapter were developed in conjunction with a theoretical framework that combined elements of social constructionist masculinities theory, Bourdieu’s theory of practice, Butler’s notions of gender performance and gendered communities of practice. By integrating these theories, I aimed to provide an explanatory framework that incorporated the influence of structure and socialization on the way that young men constituted their own identity while accounting for reconstitution and change following a critical event.
7.3.1 Theoretical Analysis of Durable Risk Practices

After the intensity of the grief had faded, or even when it had not, some participants went back to doing the same risk activities that had killed their friend. I made use of Bourdieu’s theory of practice to illustrate the powerful nature of habitus, field and capital in their orientation towards, and meaning that they made of, various risk engagements. The intersections between habitus, masculinities and risk orientation were particularly evident in two groups of participants. These participants can be said to be both risk sensitive—in that they understand the environmental dangers—and risk tolerant, as they see these risks as both normal and acceptable. For participants from poor and working-class habitus, risk practices are constructed as an essential component of personal and masculine group identity. The outcome of this masculine identity construction (a tough reputation) functioned as a risk-management strategy to ward off threats from other groups of young people and adults. The habitus of the thrill-seeking participants, on the other hand, is middle/upper class, giving them access to the economic capital necessary to purchase the gear and the social capital to enter into the moneyed sites where these activities are performed. Cultural capital is gained and a masculine identity constructed through the act of taking sporting risks and achieving legendary status. Their habitus also lent them a sense of personal entitlement. Time spent in leisure is not considered wasted but contributes to growth and emancipation.

I used Butler’s notion of gender performance and Paechter’s gendered communities of practice to develop the way that these two groups of participants were informed by a communal understanding of risk. A masculine performance of risk, in fact, acted as a mechanism of identity sorting to define who was “in” and who was “out.” Their communities of practice share some identifying elements, including a rigid system of stratification and a
symbolic separation from those considered weaker. These performances, as Bourdieu believes, are at least partially unreflexive, rooted in habitus and reproduced as durable practices within community. The combined factors of habitus, field, and community of practice and gendered performance of risk indicated a strong orientation toward identity protection and an greater imperviousness to change than seen in other communities.

Another important theoretical contribution to understanding participants’ assessment of their friend’s death was the application of Bourdieu’s notion of positional suffering, wherein people adjust their expectations according to what they understand to be their objective chances. The death narratives surrounding the “inevitable” death and the “unexpected” death bore out the strong connections between habitus, social space, positional suffering and the way that the passing is situated by the participant. Firstly, there are associations between the class identity within which participants grew up, early life experiences, current life situations and the way they discussed the inevitability of the death. Without exception, death was talked about as an unexpected visitor in the lives of those who are materially, socially and culturally privileged. For those who grew up in working-class environments with experiences of poverty, violence and family conflict, death was a sad but regular occurrence.

The experience that young people of low socio-economic status, have of the deaths of numerous peers is statistically confirmed, particularly for those who are Aboriginal. As a recent Canadian study on the social determinants of health illustrates, those with material and social deprivation have less access to resources to ensure health and well-being, including food, clothing and safe housing. At a social level, deprivation presents barriers to participation in the social, cultural and educational activities that mitigate exclusion.
Individuals living in neighbourhoods where deprivation was most intense had death rates 28% higher than wealthy neighbourhoods (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010).

It is evident that dominant groups, those with greater political and economic resources, have the necessary authority to institute versions of truth. Less dominant groups whose habitus and social spaces are signified by deprivation are dismissed as undesirable (Poland, 2000). This notion extends to the idea that some individuals and groups can “expect” to die young while others can expect to do great things and live to an old age. The death of a young person from a marginalized or poor group is, at best, a symbol of a social ill, while the death of a young person from a dominant group is a loss to society. The dominant discourse, wherein some deaths are situated as more important than others, pervaded the interview data; articulated and largely uncontested by participants from all perspectives.

The different assessments that participants make of their friend’s death is consistent with Butler’s (2004) and McNeill’s (2008) supposition that some lives are more “grieve-able” than others. In a comparison of memorials created for women who were killed in the Montreal Massacre and those for women killed on the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, McNeill (2008) maintains that some deaths lend themselves more easily to public mourning than do others. As Butler writes “Certain faces must be admitted into public view, must be seen and heard for some keener sense of the value of life, all life, to take hold” (2004, p. xviii).

Habitus, field and communities of practice influenced another grouping of participants who reported a reluctance to modify risk practices following the death of their
friend, for a number of reasons. Primarily, this group did not adapt their own risky practices because they did not imagine themselves dying in the same way. Their friends died after taking a risk that these men classified as unnecessary (largely clustered in the “ridiculous” or unexpected deaths). Participants discussed the risks that their friends took, through activities such as drinking and driving or substance use, as inessential to maintain his reputation or masculine identity. They perceived the risk that resulted in their friend’s death to be a predictable outcome of a practice, but would never consider it a hazard to their own mortality. These participants did not identify as “risk takers” and thereby saw no real reason to reflect on or adapt their behaviour. They, in contrast to those who experienced positional suffering, had the strong expectation that they would live a long and full life.

In a divergence from the doxa that associates a poor/working-class habitus with an earlier death than a middle/upper-class one, certain forms of identity protection level the field. From an epidemiological perspective, for example, binge drinking would constitute taking a risk—an elevated chance of injury or death. Evidence points to both the prevalence and perils of over-drinking among college men (Capraro, 2000; De Visser, 2009). As evidenced in Chapter Five, participants from more privileged backgrounds tended not to consider regular occurrences of being very drunk as risk behaviour. This was true even for young men who had friends die of alcohol-related deaths. The phenomenon lends support to the notion that what is considered risky and what is framed as a routine practice of a community is socially constructed.
7.3.2 Theoretical Analysis of Shifting Risk Practices

Theories of gender performance and communities of practice helped to create an explanatory model for why participants made the decision to shift masculine ideals and risk practices. Risk engagement is a performance of identity, a valued masculine practice that is transmitted by the communities of practice of which participants are members. As Mitchell, Crawshaw, Bunton and Green suggest (2001) suggest, one’s social identity, given meaning within community, is vastly important in one’s orientation towards risk. Drawing from Butler’s (1990b) framework, the fact that identities are performed indicates that risky masculinities are not immutable. For some participants, the death of a friend acted as a critical moment of change triggering a shift in the most deeply inculturated dispositions, norms, values and beliefs.

Using Paechter’s theory of gendered communities of practice, I described the way that some participants adapted masculine risk identities through either being a part of reconstituting masculine norms within their primary communities of practice or consciously leaving these communities of practice for ones more reflective of their newly constituted identities. Participants who were motivated by the death of their friend to reflect on and adapt risk practices were better able to do so if they had the support of their previous community of practice, or if significant others emerged to form a new community of practice. As the findings in Chapter Six illustrate, simultaneously entering into a period of liminality that was brought on by grief, enabled a group change. Alternatively, the participants sought out new community, feeling that they had no more to gain from remaining in the previous one.

This new community of practice (created or found) functioned to produce a revised masculine identity that was not dependent on perpetual performances of risk. In a dramatic
shift, these participants rejected hyper-masculine practices. Their world view appeared to shift as they became *more* communitarian—seeing themselves as interdependent, with the world around them rather than separate. Because the move to new communities of practice and new identities were often triggered by women, there was a rupture in the gendered relations that occurred for participants. The influence of women and girls, as respected individuals rather than as part of a consumer cache, became evermore relevant.

The participants who were most likely to make a change by leaving a community of practice were of poor/working-class habitus. Their reflexivity regarding their lifestyle, health/risk practices and future contributed to a shift in community and masculine values, as did the desire to create a legacy from the friend’s life and death.

### 7.4 Practical Contributions

What is remarkable is that, given all of the elements that present barriers to change, some of the participants in this study did so. All of the participants who modified risk practices following the death of their friend had friends and peers from similar circumstances who did not change their risk behaviour. These were not participants who adapted risky practices because they aged out of them, as would be more typical, but because they had an experience that caused them to reflect on mortality and the nature of their lifestyles. The death triggered in them a conversion experience.

It was not the aim of this qualitative study, with its constructivist framework, to create a set of objective measures through which one could predict or facilitate risk behaviour change. Findings indicated, however, that four conditions seemed to be present in
the lives of participants who did report a shift in their masculine orientation towards risk-taking:

- they were aware or gained a heightened awareness of their own mortality
- participants had the understanding support of another person or other people in their life that facilitated their reflexivity
- current communities of practice changed to accommodate different masculine performances or new communities of practices emerged to support a new identity
- the participant felt as though it was important to create a legacy from their friend’s death by living a new life.

The following section is an accounting of the ways that researchers, policymakers, parents, educators, grief counsellors and/or health professionals can support young men in their grief following the loss of a friend through accidental death and mediate future risk-taking among survivors.

There is no one masculine way to feel or express grief but masculinities are woven through grief practices. With this understanding, supporters should neither fully embrace constructs of traditional masculine grief nor should they dismiss them entirely. Rather, health practitioners should make it part of their practice to determine the nature of masculine performance of grieving within community through finding ways to listen and invite young men to tell their stories of grief.

The perception of some participants was that they had reached “rock bottom” when their friend died; reaching this level proved to be an opportunity to open a new chapter on life. This underscores the idea that the time following the death of a friend is a critical moment at which young men may be open to change in a way that they had not been previously. In addition, the notion that they are in an empowered position to create a legacy
from their friend’s life and death is a positive way that could potentially support the individual to move from a place of despair. Integrated supports offered to young men that support them, not only in the grief process, but in reflecting on their communities of practice and masculine risk performances could be generative.

The supports that scaffold risk practice change were both informal—including family and friends—and formal—youth workers, coaches, teachers and spiritual leaders. There should be further training for those working in services already in place to support young men in some of the specificities of men’s grief practices. Policymakers should also consider interventions to support the informal support systems. This will be particularly helpful for young men who are reluctant to seek formal help services; peer-based or parent-based interventions may achieve greater results. In addition, while some participants who enacted significant change in their lives did so with immediacy, for others change was more iterative and occurred over a longer term. Providing support and training, when required, to people who are already in the lives of young men is more realistic than having a professional centrally involved for the long term.

Dominant social discourse informs the different ways that life is valued and death is grieved. With the premise that all life is equally precious, counsellors positioned to work with young men experiencing grief and researchers and policymakers that contribute to social discourse should work with the unique elements that frame the interpretation of loss. The positional suffering that young people from marginalized communities experience, for example, is supported by the approaches designed to mitigate injury and preserve life. Harm-reduction strategies should not be the only ones made available to marginalized youth because it indicates to them that survival is the best that can be hoped for. The media is also
complicit in reporting some deaths as more tragic than other deaths. Deaths of young men from marginalized communities are reported with a tone of inevitability—particularly those deaths from drug overdose.

Within the social space of thrill-seeking, cultural capital is related to valour and a death can be assessed as heroic. Findings demonstrated that individuals within these communities tend to see each other as separate from those outside of their circle. When a person within the community dies from engaging in an adventure activity, there appears to be a sense that nobody would really understand and therefore the input or support of outsiders may be construed as unwelcome. The fear that one might die is overaken by the romantic image of the honourable death. While other groups of participants may use other cognitive strategies to avoid reflecting on their own mortality, there was no narrative that approached the identity protection involved in the narrative of the adventurer. The findings would suggest that change within this community needs to start within the culture. For change to occur at the cultural level there must be a dialogue initiated within the contexts that thrill seeking and adventure sports take place, such as resort communities, with regards to the influence of messaging that promotes a “lawless” mentality towards mechanisms designed to prevent injury and death.

Some interventions to prevent accidental injury and death are structural; a focus on the reallocation of resources and a contextual examination of the social and cultural mechanisms at play in marginalized communities. The conditions on the streets in these neighbourhoods are at least partially due to material deprivation. Cycles of poverty within families can indicate that there are high levels of chaos and fracture. Low paying jobs imply that parents must work constantly to earn enough to support children. Rampant gang
recruitment and criminal activity puts young people at risk. Violence on the streets is a regular occurrence, and from a young age both boys and girls adopt postures of defence to avoid being victimized.

Interventions at the social level should then shift from its current focus on policy enforcement to one that strengthens the social safety net. Better jobs with higher pay are needed to ensure that parents can both earn a living wage and adequately care for their children. Schools need to have more frequent and integrated programs to identify those young people who are particularly at risk. Communities need to offer more opportunities for young people to have mentorship from successful youth in their neighbourhood and generative volunteer opportunities. Health and community groups should work together to strategize hyper-masculine and homophobic attitudes that are normalized within groups of boys. Both school and community groups should offer more sexual and relationship health opportunities to facilitate balanced and respectful gender relations.

7.5 Future Research or “Where do we go from here?”

As I embarked on this project I wanted to make sure that I could interview as diverse a group of men as possible. I wanted to represent in my data a variety of backgrounds, socio-economic status and risk practices. While, in the confines of numeric limits, this goal was achieved, I wondered if I had sacrificed depth for breadth. It would have been interesting, for instance, to have a larger group of thrill-seekers in order to find out more about the divergence of voices in this community. Or include more young men who were surviving on the streets to build a more detailed picture of what they experience in their daily lives. So, while broad statements and observations can be made about masculinities, risk and grief, I
believe that there is the need for in-depth study on individual communities of practice and how orient towards risk practices.

Over the course of recruitment, I received a number of calls from young men who had experienced the death of a female friend. Because this project was focused on the deaths of male friends I had to inform them (as gently as possible) that they were not eligible for the study. Beyond feeling badly for having to tell them that their loss did not qualify, it gave me cause to reflect that men who have lost female friends (as well as females losing friends of either gender) would also provide interesting data. Not only would this research provide a counterpoint to the gendered discussion of men who have lost men, but it would add depth to knowledge about young people’s grief.

Another potential area for future research is young men’s engagement with cyberspace and online communities. One issue that was touched upon, but never fully developed, was the way that the private self has had a drastic ascendance in the media and how this phenomenon influences expressions of grief. Through the prevalence of reality shows, online blogs and social networking sites, the private self has become intensely reflexive, crafted for the consumption of the public. Even a short amount of time spent on the internet can give the impression that no thought, no opinion, no feeling is ever expressed outside of the public domain. A question for future research on the topic of risk, grief and masculine performance is the aim of accessing an “inner world” when this is so out of vogue?

Finally, throughout this process of research I have been exceedingly grateful for the critical and insightful scholarship done, especially in the areas of masculinities and gender and health. I am also thankful for health research, previously done, that has employed
various theoretical lenses. Without such work I could not have conceived of this project nor could I have woven my data into findings. This said, I believe that there is room for more research on young men’s health and risk practices from a critical theoretical perspective, underpinned by an understanding of the power inequity in social locations of race, class and ability among men. There is space to employ a gender relations perspective in masculinity research that recognizes the relative positioning of men among men and men and women in the creation of communities of practice.

Without such a critical standpoint, health research runs the risk of producing simple answers to very complex problems. Without an understanding how the historical subject is produced, the researcher can create insufficient markers for change. Or, as Haines (2008) points out, evidence-based interventions designed to change behaviour ends up marginalizing other populations.

7.6 Conclusion

To conclude this dissertation I return to the motivation behind this research. Over the course of the time that I have done some final edits, two young men have died in this province while car surfing. Car surfing is a stunt in which an individual climbs on top of a moving car and attempts to stand on its roof. There is a balancing act as the “surfer” tries to maintain equilibrium and not fall off. This morning I listened to the tearful statement of the mother whose son did not make it to the roof and was crushed under the wheels of the car driven by his friend. “Very few [activities that her son did] were life risking,” she said “but I mean, he was bulletproof. He was 21. Guys at that age group, they make terrible decisions.”
For whatever reason—age, brain development, social construction of masculinity or perhaps a combination of all these factors—some young men do make, as Errone Ward stated, terrible decisions. And sometimes these decisions do not have consequences. Some people get in their cars drunk and do not get into accidents. Some head out into the back country without proper training or equipment and have a great morning of skiing. Some go downtown to fight and it does not have consequences. Other times there is an injury, which serves as a wake-up call, and sometimes, as the participants in this study experienced, death is the sad result of a risk engagement.

The aftermath of the death of a young person is a terrible thing. It shakes the belief that dying is for the old and sick, not for the young who still have dreams to fulfill and time to correct their mistakes, and maybe turn the exuberance of young into home, work and family. As the participants expressed, there is brokenness, numbness, disorientation, anger, sadness and a deep, abiding feeling of loss. Families and friends are blown apart and some never recover.

While this kind of death brings too much pain to ever be considered a positive event, it can leave an important legacy. It can bring people closer together and motivate personal, social and political change in honour of the person who has died. Grief has the power to transpose even the most durable of hegemonic masculine practices, opening young men up to authentic, responsible and healthy relationships. Grief can also motivate new research, such as this work, that can open new pathways for research and practice.

Over the past year I have had the profound privilege of entering into vulnerable spaces of people’s stories. I am grateful for the opportunity and, despite the horror and pain
that I have born witness to, I have great hope that, for many of these young men, there is a bright future.

The final words I leave with one participant who illuminates:

I don’t know, I remember when the time hit after about four months after it happened and the only thing I wanted to do was see him and hit him. That’s the only thing I wanted to do like, “why the fuck did you do this, look what you put everyone through.” At the same time, his death probably gave, not hope but strength for people that were really good friends with him like, “I’m going to pursue this and do well because of the fact that he is not able to.” He was a very smart kid and very well brought up and everything, strategic and smart and everything. If he had… he could have done well and the fact that he didn’t and wasn’t able to have that chance to succeed, it like hits you because you think, “if I don’t do this, I could pass away tomorrow and the next thing I know.” I am a changed person.”
REFERENCES


Poland, B. (2000). The 'considerate' smoke in public space: The micro-politics and political economy of 'doing the right thing'. Health and Place, 6(1), 1–14.


Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

Have you lost a male friend to sudden and unexpected death?

If you or someone you know experienced the unexpected death of a male friend in his late teens or early to mid 20’s, we invite you to be interviewed for a study about young men and responses to death of a peer.

This death may have been the result from an accident such as fast driving, drug or alcohol related incidents or overdose, outdoor activities, sports or other activities.

Part of this research also involves taking photos as a way to describe experiences to the interviewer.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive $20 per interview for up to 3 interviews.

If you are a man age 19 to 25 yrs and interested in this study, contact study coordinators Gen and Jennifer:
◆ cell/text: 778-919-8702 (Vancouver)
◆ cell/text: 604-902-2739 (Whistler)
◆ email: guysresearch.ubc@gmail.com

MORE INFO: www.guysresearch.ca

All interviews are TOTALLY CONFIDENTIAL, and VOLUNTARY.

Study recruitment dates: Feb 2010-March 2011
**Appendix B: Study Information and Consent Form**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**Young Men and the Death of a Male Friend Research Project**

**Interviws with Young Men (19-25 yrs)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact for Study:</th>
<th>Principal Investigator:</th>
<th>Co-Investigators:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen Creighton</td>
<td>Dr. Elizabeth Saewyc</td>
<td>Dr. John Oliffe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell: (xxx) xxx-xxxx</td>
<td>Phone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx</td>
<td>Dr. Shauna Butterwick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-mail- xxxxxxxxx</td>
<td>e-mail-xxxxxxx</td>
<td></td>
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**Purpose:**

In order to support the well-being of young men who have lost a friend due to an accident, we need to know about how young men respond to that loss and what health care providers and others can do to assist them.

**Who is Eligible to Participate?**

You are being asked to participate in a research study to about your experiences after the accidental death of your friend if:

- You are between age 19 and 25
- You can speak and read English
- Your friend died while you were a teen or a young adult (within the past few years)
- If the death happened as a result of an accident such as car or other motor vehicle accident, death involving drugs or alcohol, or death from involvement in extreme sports like an avalanche while in backcountry or fall from climbing.

**Procedures:**

Participating in this study will involve participating in two interviews with a researcher for approximately 1 hour each and taking photographs between these interviews. A key piece of the study entails taking photos in response to a questionnaire and talking about them afterwards.

In the first meeting the following will be discussed:

- Brief information about your background, and about the accidental death of your friend.
- The process of taking photos and the conversation to follow.

In the second and third meeting, we will go through the photos that you have taken and talk about them. The researcher will only view the digital photos chosen by you.

These interviews will be recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed for data analysis.
Possible Benefits and Risks:

The possible benefits to you for participating in this study are that you will have the opportunity to talk about your experience and learn about services available to young men. Your involvement may help improve services for young men in the future.

A risk of participating in this study is that you may experience emotional stress as a result of talking about the death of your friend.

Confidentiality:
Personal records relating to this study will be kept confidential. Any research data collected about you during this study will not identify you by name, only by a coded number. Your name will not be disclosed to anyone beyond the research team. Any report published as a result of this study will not identify you by name.
All recorded interviews, transcribed interviews and photos will be stored securely and separately from any contact information to ensure confidentiality. All data will be stored for at least 5 years and then recorded interview files will be erased. De-identified transcripts and photo records will be kept for further analysis and reports.

The photos that you take may be used in research write ups and presentations but, unless you request, you will not be identified as the photographer.

Voluntary Participation:

You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time, and your relationship with UBC will not be affected in any way.

Compensation:

To compensate you for your time, you will be provided with $20 following each one of the two interviews. We will loan you a digital camera if you do not have one of your own or if you prefer the features on the loan camera. We will also provide you with one set of prints of the photos you have taken, or one CD of the photos, whichever you prefer.

Contact Names and Telephone Numbers:

Should you have further questions or concerns about this study you are free to contact the Principle Investigator Elizabeth Saewyc at (604) xxx-xxxx, or the study contact person, Gen Creighton at (604) xxx-xxxx

You may also contact Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia at (604) 822-8598.
Research Consent Form

Part 1

**Young Men and Death of a Male Friend: Young Guy Cohort (19-25 yrs old)**

Contact for Study: Genevieve Creighton  
Cell: (xxx) xxx-xxxx  
e-mail

Principal Investigator: Dr. Elizabeth Saewyc  
Phone: (xxx) xxx- xxxx  
e-mail

Co-Investigators:  
Dr. John Oliffe  
Dr. Shauna Butterwick

Part 2

1. Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study? □ Yes □ No
2. Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet? □ Yes □ No
3. Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study? □ Yes □ No
4. Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? □ Yes □ No
5. Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give a reason? □ Yes □ No
6. Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you? □ Yes □ No
7. Who explained this study to you? ____________________________

Part 3

I agree to take part in this study □ Yes □ No

Signature of Research Participant ________________________________

Printed Name ____________________________________________

Signature of Investigator/Designee ________________________________

Date ____________________________________________________

THE INFORMATION SHEET MUST BE ATTACHED TO THIS CONSENT FORM AND A COPY GIVEN TO THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANT
Appendix C: First Meeting Interview Protocol for Interviewer

Interviewer will welcome participant and review the study information and consent procedures. Once consent has been obtained, the interviewer will proceed to cover the following areas:

- Current Activities
- Details about friend’s death
- Outlining the Photo Assignment part of the project
- Collecting Demographic information
- Arrangements for interim contact and next meeting

1. What are you doing right now in your life?
2. How do you like to spend your time?
3. What is your living situation?
4. How did you know your friend who died?
5. How old were you when he died? How old was he?
6. I’m wondering if you could tell me a bit about the circumstances surrounding your friend’s death?

Photo Elicitation Instruction

“The main subject that I want to explore in this research is the way that guys deal with the loss of a friend through an activity that might be described as ‘risky’. I’m interested in knowing if your beliefs and how you think about things have changed because you’ve experienced this loss. I’m also interested in knowing what helped you through the process of recovering from your friend’s death or what, if it had been out there, might have been helpful.

“This will be a different kind of interview. I have chosen what is called ‘photo elicitation’ as method of interviewing because talking about things like death and health are sometimes hard to find the words to talk about. Some people believe that images are another way to explain something.

“So, I’m not going to ask you any more questions right now. I’m going to give you a camera (or you can use your own) and a questionnaire and, instead of writing down your answers to the questions, you will take pictures. When you come back in two weeks I will load your images onto the computer and you can select the images that you are okay to discuss with me. You will direct the conversation and I will ask questions where there are points that I don’t understand.

“Some of the pictures you take will be concrete answers, such as “Where did you and your friend hang out” and you might take a picture of a place that you hung out. Other times, your pictures might be more symbolic, like when you want to show an image that represents something.”

[Give participant the Photo Assignment handout] “Take a look at that and let me know if you have questions. If you are not sure what I am asking you to do, I’ll try and clarify.”
Demographic Questions

Now I need some basic demographic information. Can you tell me your….

1. Age:
2. Neighbourhood you reside in currently:
3. Self-described ethnicity:
4. Level of education:

Interim Contact and Next meeting:

“When would be best for our next meeting? Let’s try to make it in the next two weeks. [arrange a time and place for second interview]

“In the meantime, if you have any questions, or concerns, you can contact me at my email address and by phone [give info sheet with contact information on it if participant needs another one].

“If doing this research feels like it is bringing up some stuff for you and you need to talk to someone, I am going to give you this list of resources. There are numbers here for different kinds of counseling services. [give list of resources].

“If you are okay with it, I’ll email you in about a week just to check in and see how it is going. Are you okay with that? Sometimes participants have found it helpful for the researcher to give a little reminder or check in. If not, I’ll wait to hear from you.” [ascertain permission to contact participant in a week].

Thanks for being a part of this project. Talk to you soon.
Appendix D: Photo Assignment Questionnaire

The University of British Columbia

Young Men and the Death of a Male Friend Research Project

Contact for Study: Genevieve Creighton
Cell: (xxx) xxx-xxxx
e-mail

Principal Investigator: Dr. Elizabeth Saewyc
Phone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx
e-mail

Photo Assignment

This is a questionnaire that you will answer with pictures and not words. You can answer the question with a photo of something concrete or in a way that it is more symbolic. Feel free to take as many pictures as you wish to answer each question. There is absolutely no “correct” answer. Take photos that seem right to you. In order to be respectful of privacy, please don’t take pictures of people.

- Where did you and your friend hang out?
- What did you and your friend do together?
- After your friend died what did you do and where did you go?
- What places remind you of your friend?
- What do you do to honour your friend?
- Take a picture of something that represents how you felt after your friend died.
- What symbolizes being a man to you?
- What do you think symbolizes being a man to your friends?
- What does it mean to ‘man up’?
- What is one thing you can’t say?
Appendix E: Second Meeting Interview Protocol for Interviewer

In the 2\textsuperscript{nd} meeting, the interviewer will go through the photos that the participant has taken. The following questions will be asked (if appropriate) during the process of discussing the photos.

First, participant will be asked to show photos he has taken. Second, the interviewer will ask

1. Tell me a story of something that you and your friend did together.
2. Were you at your friend’s funeral? Did you speak? What would you say if you could speak?
3. What do you wish that you could have said to your friend before he died?
4. What did you think/feel when you first found out that your friend had died?
5. How did you cope with those feelings? How did you deal?
6. Which man, either fiction or real, do you idealize as a person that you would like to be like? How does this man express feelings of sadness, anger, guilt…

7. What has changed about your life since your friend died?
8. How do you think differently about life and death?
9. Do you think differently about (the particular risky activity) after losing somebody close to you?
10. What do you do to take care of yourself?
11. Why do you keep up (this activity) even after your buddy died doing it? or Why did you make the decision to stop?
12. What helped you to recover after your friend died? Who or what helped? What didn’t help?
14. What (supports?) do you wish had been there for you when you were feeling the worst?
## Appendix F: Table F.1 Phases of Research and Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase of Research</th>
<th>Steps taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Organizing data in preparation for analysis| • Prepared interview guide based on study research questions  
• Generated data through interviews and photo assignment  
• Created a file for each participant that included digital recording of interviews and digital photos.  
• Sent out digital recordings of interviews to be professionally transcribed.  
• Added completed transcription to participant’s file.  
• Checked transcription against digital recordings for errors  
• Re-formatted transcriptions in preparation for entry into computer assisted data analysis software. |
| Preliminary Data Analysis                  | • Developed a set of bucket codes that emerged from the conceptual categories present in the research questions, those questions in the photo assignment, and categories within the theoretical framework.  
• Created a code book that described and delimited the pre-existing codes using field notes and transcription notes as a reference. |
| Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis| • Imported formatted transcripts and photographs into ATLAS ti.  
• Imputed codes into the code manager attached to the Hermeneutic unit.  
• Proceeded through the transcripts, adding new codes as appropriate.  
• Recoded transcripts using new codes  
• Using the Family function, added sub codes that demonstrated contrasting responses to lines of inquiry.  
• Using Network view- built a graphical representations of connections and associations between and among categories  
• Photos were linked to the participant’s interview |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Stage</th>
<th>Tool or Method</th>
<th>Data Tool or Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Recruitment    | Contact form indicating demographic and contact info | • 25 forms (from eligible participants)  
• Tracking all appointments, cancellations & rescheduled visits |
| Part 1         | Semi-structured interview | 25 interviews transcribed  
Interview field notes |
| Part 2         | Photos (n=20) | 420 images |
| Part 2         | Semi-structured interviews | 20 interviews transcribed  
Interview field notes |
# Appendix G: Table G.1 Coding Structure

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Coding Structure</th>
<th>Refined Coding Structure</th>
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<td>Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change_personal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Common Practices</td>
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<td>Finding Out</td>
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<td>Label</td>
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Appendix H: Participants and Narratives

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Appendix I: Introducing the participants

Demographic overview

Participants ranged in age between 19 and 26 with a median age of 22. They were predominantly Caucasian (with a number of them identifying with specific European backgrounds) but also included Aboriginal and non-White individuals. While sexual orientation was not a demographic question asked of participants, the majority spoke of heterosexual relationships and/or encounters. Participants lived in a variety of neighbourhoods in or near the city of Vancouver including West and East Vancouver, Surrey, Burnaby, Maple Ridge, New Westminster and Whistler.

The friends of participants had between one month and 3 years prior to the interview. Friends of participants died in a variety of ways but most commonly by way of drug overdose and motor vehicle accidents.

![Figure A.1 Causes of Death](image)

Participant Biographies

This section provides short biographies for the young men who volunteered to participate in this study. They are intended to be general enough to maintain the anonymity of participants while not losing their personhood.

1) Joe is White, 22 years old and is in the process of moving cities to go to graduate school. He has always been active in a variety of sports, including kayaking, soccer and snowboarding. His employment history includes many jobs working with children and youth. Joe’s friend died two years ago falling through the glass roof of a building that he and his friends had climbed during a party.

2) Amir is 20 years old and lives with his mother and two brothers. Amir’s family are refugees, forced to flee a country after the murder of his father. Amir came close to graduating and has plans to make up the course that he missed. He is currently employed as a house painter and he enjoys art and photography. Amir has lost
numerous friends to accidents and overdose in the past three years. The interview focused on the death of his friend due to a motorcycle accident while under the influence.

3) Alex is 25 years old and White. He has a 4 year old daughter whom he sees regularly. Alex works as a painter and landscaper and lives with his girlfriend. He is a former meth addict and continues to use on an occasional basis. Learning disabilities prevented him from graduating from high school and he has no plans to go back to school. In his spare time he is a photographer and artist. Alex’s friend died after his car went off the road and rolled down a cliff.

4) Markus is 25 years old and describes himself as “White Canadian”. He is currently in graduate school doing his master’s degree. He lives part time with his girlfriend and commutes to the city to work. He was a nationally ranked soccer player all the way through high school and still plays in a league. He spent much of high school caring for his mother who suffers from PTSD and alcoholism. His friend died in a car accident.

5) Damien is a White 22 years old finishing off his undergrad degree and spends the summers living with his family. His family is exceptionally well off, sending him to boarding school for high school graduation. He is working toward a business degree in order to go into marketing and advertising. He is heavily into all sorts of sports and often goes into the ‘bush’ to camp. Damien is a twin. His friend died on graduation night; hit by a bus in front of him.

6) Jacob is 23 years old and Métis. He is in recovery after living for years on the streets addicted to drugs. He grew up in northern B.C. and describes his childhood as ‘traumatic’. Jacob did not graduate high school but would like to when he is in a more stable place. He is currently a client in a recovery house and accesses a number of counseling services. Jacob plays basketball and hockey with a team of young people who are also in recovery. His friend drowned in a boating accident where substances were likely involved.

7) Micah is 19 years old and closely identifies with his Italian heritage. He is currently working but would like to return to university when he has decided what he would like to do for a career. Micah’s father left the family when Micah was young. This
had a major influence on Micah’s life course and he returned to this topic many times over the course of the interview. Micah’s friend died in a motorcycle accident following a party at which he was drinking.

8) Shawn is 19 years old and White. He is very much a soccer person; he both plays the game at an international level and is an avid fan. He had difficulty in school. He reports that, it wasn’t that the academics were hard, it was that he couldn’t keep his “attitude in check”. He was expelled from high school in grade ten and had to register somewhere else. Since graduation he has changed his life significantly. He has completed first year university and, following a year long break, will return to school. Shawn’s friend was killed in a motorcycle accident following a graduation party.

9) Simon is a White, 24 year old university graduate. He grew up in small town BC and moved to the city when he began his studies. Now that he has graduated he is unclear what his next life step will be. He loves playing soccer and basketball as well as more artistic pursuits. His childhood friend was killed in a car accident when he fell asleep at the wheel.

10) Chris is a 23 year old young man from Eastern Europe who has graduated from university. His family moved to a small town in Canada when he was in grade three and he moved to a large city to go to university when he turned 19. He currently lives in a rented house with three other guys his age. Chris’s friend died in a bike accident while Chris was on vacation. He wasn’t able to return immediately and the funeral had already occurred when he got back. Missing out on the memorial was significant to Chris.

11) Marty is a 22 year old Aboriginal man. When he moved from a small town to the city he had serious substance abuse issues. He was not able to graduate from high school. He has since been able to get sober and currently works with youth living on the streets. He enjoys hanging out with friends and reading magazines. Marty’s friend died in a car accident while driving drunk.

12) Stephen is 24 years old and Aboriginal. He dropped out of school during grade nine and lived in a number of foster homes throughout his adolescence. He has used drugs off and on throughout his life but got sober after his friend died of an overdose. He is
involved in a social service group for aboriginal youth and helps to facilitate workshops. Art is an important part of his life and facilitates his self expression.

13) Levi is 24 years old and White. He is in his final year of Tech. College after which he would like to teach shop. He feels strongly that he is called to be a mentor for kids that mainstream school system does not work for. He told me that the adults in his life that did not dismiss him as a ‘bad kid’ were the difference between getting lost in substances and going on to post secondary education. His friend was stabbed in front of a downtown club.

14) Ethan is 24 years old and Aboriginal. He is currently living in an apartment with his mother but will soon be moving to the valley to attend Bible College. Ethan was not previously a religious person but became interested in spiritual growth following the death of his friend to a drug overdose. He said that it was at this time that he realized that his own life of alcoholism was not making him happy. He had to turn away from his entire family and peer group in order to ‘get healthy’, a situation that he says is ‘pretty freakin’ lonely’.

15) Jayden is a 23 year old, White high school graduate. He currently lives with his parents in a wealthy neighbourhood in the city. He describes his life as ‘dedicated to sports’- playing them, watching them and talking about them. He has no university as of yet but plans to attend in the fall. His friend died while drinking and driving in Vancouver. He was shaken by the death because ‘he was the very last person that you can imagine dead at 22’.

16) Daniel is a 23 year old, White and a self described ‘citizen of the planet’. He is an artist, photographer, juggler, skate park designer writer, ‘whatever people will pay me to do, and that’s what I am’. He spent significant time in Asia surfing and doing drugs. He currently lives in a loft apartment and is on his way to a job harvesting medical marijuana. His friend died of a prescription drug overdose in a small town in Asia. He said it was shocking to the community because his was ‘not really into drugs’. He had been given the drugs by a known drug dealer.

17) Noah is White, 21 years old from a city suburb. He is registered in a career college and spends his free time practicing with his heavy metal band. Noah reports that, compared to where he was headed as a teen, he has completely changed his life. He
was caught driving a car that he had stolen and put in “juvie”. He ended up at an alternative school where he ended up thriving. His friend recently died from a drug overdose.

18) Jose is 19 years old and from Central American descent. The last grade that Jose remembers completing was grade five. His mother was a prostitute and a drug addict who kicked him out when he was 11. He lived in foster homes and on the streets and has been in and out of jail for charges of possession and assault. He got clean and moved back home with his mother after his ‘only real friend’ died of a drug overdose. Jose is currently unemployed but would love to design video games if given the chance.

19) Michael is 23 years old and from a Middle Eastern background. He comes from a large family, many of whom live in different parts of the world. He spends a great deal of time skiing and snowboarding and has funded his university study by teaching “snow sports”. His friend died while skiing out of bounds.

20) Aiden is a 24 year old who is currently managing promotions for several clubs in the city. He talked about not taking school very seriously until one day, while riding a bus downtown, he saw a sign that advertised a marketing program at a technical school. Aiden knew immediately that this is what he wanted to do with his life. After a few years in the business, Aiden bought a house in the city with his girlfriend. His friend was shot by the RCMP in while they were responding to a call.

21) Ben is a 20 year old young man of South Asian descent. He is into soccer and rock climbing and has just finished his first year of university. Over the summer he worked two jobs- often putting in 18 hours a day- so he could focus on his studies in the fall. He lives with his parents and younger brother but hopes to move out on his own soon. Ben’s friend died in a motorcycle crash while driving under the influence following a grad party.

22) Nathan is 22 years old, Jamaican and living in the city. He currently is working as a sous chef in a downtown restaurant. Nathan did not graduate from high school because he disliked the other students. He did not share an interest in sports or academics and felt marginalized. He preferred to do art and hang out with his one
friend smoking weed. This friend died two years ago, killed in a fight outside of a downtown bar.

23) Dylan is White, 23 years old and hails from small town out of province. He has just graduated university with a degree in Theatre. He volunteers at a community theatre and is primarily in charge of direction and production. Dylan’s high school friend was found dead in his room from unknown causes. While it was suspected to be unintentional drug overdose, there was never any confirmation about what exactly transpired.

24) David is 21 years old and Aboriginal. He graduated from high school and has completed one year at a career college. He has lived with two friends in a rented house for the past two years. He has been living away from his parents for the past six years. David loves to do art, mainly graffiti. His friend died after being struck by a train during a party. David had only been gone from the gathering for half an hour when the event occurred.

25) Jason is 21 years old and about to graduate from university. He was born in Bermuda but went to school in Europe. He currently lives in the city alone, returning to visit his parents in Bermuda once per year. His friend from “back home” died in motor bike accident after leaving a bar. Jason commented that this kind of death was not uncommon for young men living on the island.